MY FRENCH FRIENDS

CONSTANCE · ELIZABETH · MAUD

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BY

CONSTANCE ELIZABETH MAUD

AUTHOR OF "AN ENGLISH GIRL IN PARIS."
"THE RISING GENERATION," ETC

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LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1904

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Printed by Ballantyne, Hanson & Co.
At the Ballantyne Press

TO

MY BEST FRIEND

MY MOTHER

PREFACE

My English Friends have shown such a kindly interest in my French Friends, and so often ask me for news of them, not even forgetting that terrible infant the *p'tit chou*, that I take courage to tell a little more of the old, and add something of a few new friends.

My ship is again at sea. This time sailing in southern instead of northern seas, so that even that well-worn road two pairs of eyes were wont to travel to the "trysting star" is closed for a while, and the Southern Cross, which sheds its kindly light on his path, is hidden from my sight.

Uncle Jack is still at Avenue Friedland, watched over by his faithful Perrette, whose vigilant eye is alert as ever, where her master is concerned.

The pleasant custom of the Sunday family dinner still continues, and Perrette announces with almost unfailing regularity every week: "Madame la Baronne" (*i.e.* Mémé, as we all call her in imitation of her grandchild, *le p'tit chou*),

"Monsieur le Baron" (*i.e.* Gustave d'Aville, her son), "Monsieur et Madame Lefebvre" (son-in-law and daughter of Mémé), "Mademoiselle Jacqueline" (*le p'tit chou*, child of the latter), and "etcetera!" This etcetera has always included the appendages of the *chou*, namely, her *bonne* Julie, her dog Mouton, her dolls the "Impératrice Eugénie," "Jeanne d'Arc," and the "Gollywog."

The old Général de Lille is also a frequent guest on these occasions, being a special crony of Uncle Jack.

The inexhaustible subject of Gustave's future marriage is invariably discussed, but still remains "in the air," though both mother and son are beginning to feel that the days of his happy, irresponsible *vie de garçon* are numbered, and "it must be that Gustave, the poor boy, he marries himself," or rather that his mother arranges for him a marriage of suitability.

Madame d'Aville, our beloved Mémé, is just the same, and always will be the same—inside, at all events—in spite of, perhaps by reason of, all she goes through, for her existence is a rapid series of vivid emotions. She feels everything with equal intensity, whether it befalls herself or others, and enjoys like a child all things, great and small, which admit of the possibility of enjoyment.

I wish I could say of the *p'tit chou*, for the satisfaction of my English friends, that she has "ranged herself"; but, alas, that process, which by six years old should certainly have completed itself, is still in the first and most intermittent stage. "It is not her fault, poor angel," as her Mémé says; it is the Uncle Jacquot who is to blame, and Gustave, and the concierge, and the Marquis, and Madame de Bretelle, and every one who comes within the fatal radius of that dementing child, especially Mémé herself. She gave up entirely saying *le mot* (the forbidden *cochon*) for nearly six months, but as she adopted the expression *sacré tonnerre* instead, it could hardly be regarded as a step in the right direction, and her poor Mémé began to dread a sudden explosion of *les mots*, even more than she had *le mot* in the past.

The little Jules, whenever he is in Paris, and her former playmate Alphonse, are still among the *chou's* abject slaves. Her own heart, however, is entirely unshackled, though to strengthen the chains of her victims she coquettes with them shamelessly when the mood takes her. She adores the *bébé*, to whom she gave such a hesitating welcome, and plays the *rôle* of mother with the fervour she throws into everything. Even the devoted *nourrice* or *nou-nou* of the *bébé* is

obliged to admit, "willingly she would tear off the blue ribbons of my cap and make herself hanged with them, if that could serve the little one—but she permits not that any other should do as much. She and me, we alone may care for the *bébé*. It is a will of iron that child! A character of Napoleon in the body of a little fairy."

My friend of the emotional tenor voice, Monsieur de Sérignan, up to the time I begin these pages is still much on my mind; for I have not as yet succeeded in keeping my rather rash promise, to find him a *jeune fille Anglaise*, beautiful, charming, intelligent, and rich, as a substitute for myself! He, meanwhile, is taking no steps to marry himself, but contentedly leaving it all to me.

Madame de Fleury, the gay Marquise, continues to defy the hand of time with the hand of the *masseuse*, and the secret resources of the *Cabinet de Beauté*. "*Elle s'embellit toujours*," as her admirers never cease assuring her.

Dear old Madame de Montchesnay still walks arm in arm with her ancient lover in the Asile garden on the warm summer evenings. Their steps are a little slower and their silver heads a little more bent, but the hearts of both are filled with a deep content, for the happy marriage of

their children has fulfilled all they missed in their own lives.

Madame Vollot also is happy where alone she could find happiness. She attained her heart's desire on that day a few months ago when her spirit joined that of her "spouse adored and venerated," and her body was laid to rest by his in the imposing tomb on Montmartre.

With the budding leaf and the falling leaf Uncle Jack calls to me to come and "help him through." The voice of Paris, the luring voice of *Paris qui chante, Paris qui danse, Paris qui pleure, Paris qui souffre*, it calls me also, and I go.

For Paris is alive—vibrates with life. Mémé declares in London we all have the air of being half-dead or atrophied. In our crowded, badly-lit streets how dreary an aspect life presents as compared with the street life of Paris, the gay cafés where not only the idle but busy people may sit awhile at the small tables outside, and laugh and talk as they watch the stream of passers-by; the gay little newspaper kiosks, the frequent open-air markets of flowers and vegetables, the many avenues of trees, how sunny and fresh and bright it all is! And wherever you go the people are alive and express with keen interest what they feel about the matter in hand, whether in

the streets, the theatres, the churches, or the Chamber of Deputies.

But Mémé reproaches us that even in our London theatres we are obliged to have a loud aggressive orchestra to prevent our dropping into a lethargic stupor between the acts. "Figure to yourself how a Parisian audience would endure an interruption so tiresome," says Mémé. "The ears are cracked with that barbaric noise, and not a word may make itself to be heard if you are placed in the first armchairs. It is abominable! it is Anglo-Saxon!" Than which Mémé can utter no stronger condemnation.

"In your churches," she proceeds, "same history of boredom. You sit yourself in rows, stiff with be-Sundayed costumes, wearing the air little devout, but rather of a gravity produced by the desire to sleep. And in effect, so soon as the discourse makes itself heard, many close the eyes, and with some the mouth also finds itself open. Imagine for the preacher what a spectacle of encouragement! But the unhappy one, he also has in general the voice of one who speaks while he sleeps—it is the English voice *du reste*. Oh, you other English, by force of corking yourselves always so tightly, you arrive to have nothing to let out. The blood of life to conserve itself red and strong demands to flow; by stagnation comes

the atrophy, the lack of sensibility. I adore you individually, but nationally—*Oh - là - là !* For thee, my poor little Betty, who art of the races mixed, and none of Saxon I can declare, it must be that thou hast much suffered in those islands cold and humid !"

"That is why I come to Paris," I assure her, "to get the icicles thawed off me at least once in the year by the sun and warmth irradiated by my Mémé."

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MY FRENCH FRIENDS

I

A CHEF OF CHEFS

UNCLE JACK is often wont to lament the dearth of truly great men nowadays both in England and France, whether in the political, literary, or artistic worlds. In England they all seemed to have died since he left some twenty years ago, and adopted Paris as his home. In France things are little better, but they can at least boast one whose genius ranks him with the great men of the past, and lifts him head and shoulders, says Uncle Jack, above all contemporaries, all rivals in his own line, of whatever nationality.

Like all the truly great, however, this hero of my uncle's, though with a European reputation among the *élite*, is not the universally acclaimed of the man in the street. "To him advertising and popularity-hunting are abhorrent," says Uncle Jack, comparing him with

other so-called great ones of the earth, much to the disadvantage of the latter.

Uncle Jack was talking in this vein one day while my brother Dan was with us. He was passing through Paris on his way to join his regiment in India, and we had a week doing Paris together. Dan is an uncompromising Briton, but so human he draws his fellow-creatures toward him like a magnet.

Uncle Jack and Dan had plunged deep into the subject of Great Men (with capital letters), a subject which covers a good deal of ground in spite of Uncle Jack's severe restriction of the term.

"From that last remark of yours I am rather puzzled as to whether this truly great man of yours is politician, artist, or writer," said Dan.

"Ferdinand is one of the greatest of living artists," answered Uncle Jack reverently.

"Can one go and see his work?" inquired Dan.

"We'll go and see his work this very day," Uncle Jack replied promptly; "all three of us!" He included me with an expressive little nod. "Betty is rather in his black books; she had better come and make her peace."

"But will the light be good so late? It is nearly four o'clock now." Dan was not ignorant of studios.

"The colouring of my artist is equally fine by day or night. But his colour, as it happens, though absolutely A1, is not the main excellence of his work. That lies in the perfect composition, the exquisite combinations and harmonies, the light and subtle touch, the mastery of what Ruskin tells us is the secret of the great masters, the art of selection and rejection."

"He must be worth a visit, your old chap," replied Dan. "Well, when do you suggest starting? We must dine somewhere about seven," he reminded us, "as our theatre begins at eight o'clock."

But Uncle Jack was perverse, and would not hear of starting till half-past six, declaring we should have plenty of time for the studio, and could dine in that same part of the town; from there it would be but a short drive to the Porte St. Martin. The prospect of a revival of *Cyrano* had beguiled Uncle Jack from his usual quiet evening with a pipe and book at home.

As we crossed the Pont de l'Alma and drove along the Quai de Voltaire, Quai d'Orsay, &c., leaving fashionable Paris far behind, Uncle Jack took up his theme again. Dan had inquired what were the special subjects of this Ferdinand.

"His subjects are extraordinarily varied," replied Uncle Jack. "The birds of the air, the fish that move in deep waters, the green things that grow out of the earth—tender young things with the vividness of spring upon them—the lambs, the calves, the wild duck."

"Oh, an animal-painter." Dan's face fell.

"Hold, sir; none of your hasty conclusions. Do you call Wouverman an animal-painter because he includes the horse in his works of art, or Cuyp because the cow is a marked feature in his landscapes? The atmosphere, the surroundings, of these animals treated by the great Ferdinand are what give them their interest; a distinction, a unique personality in fact, unlike that conveyed by any other artist, to my mind. Fruits are also handled by him with a touch of equal magic. Eh, Betty?"

I agreed heartily, but added that though the works of Ferdinand had from the first attracted me, it was only under Uncle Jack's tuition I was being educated up to a full appreciation of the exquisite qualities to be discovered in them.

"Hum! One of these impressionist chaps, I suppose!" said Dan. "If Betty needs educating up to him, where shall I be? Why, she has reached the exalted stage of being able to

see all the invisible objects in a Claude Monet mist—I noticed at Durand-Ruel's this morning she did it by half shutting her eyes and giving free rein to her imagination—but I bet you I shan't know your Ferdinand's cows from his wild duck."

"Oh, I think you will," laughed Uncle Jack, "and I believe you will probably show a truer appreciation and discernment than Betty, with all her airs of *grand connaisseur* at Durand-Ruel's."

A speech I considered, whether true or no, in very poor taste, while Dan, of course, felt much elated at such praise.

"He calls his studio 'Le Nid de l'Hibou,' and here we are!" said Uncle Jack at last, as the fiacre rattled up to the modest little restaurant with its ancient sign over a doorway bearing the date 1615. Then, of course, the murder was out!

Dan was still vowing vengeance for the bad pulling his leg had received, when we entered the homely little dining-room with its sanded floor, and took our places at one of the small tables.

"You see," observed Uncle Jack, "we have none of your electric fans, no gilded mirrors, no flowers, no dementing orchestra. All is

plain, simple, and homely, as becomes the setting of true genius."

The elderly waiter who possessed these same attributes greeted my uncle and me as old friends, and laid on our table the list of "Créations faites par Ferdinand."

My uncle inquired after the great man, and was told "he had descended, but would shortly mount—it would make him a great pleasure to see Monsieur. Only yesterday it was that he made the observation how long since Monsieur had been here."

Dan was meanwhile studying the *créations* with deep interest.

"Seems a menu fit for the Olympians," he exclaimed. "Each dish in fact created for and dedicated to an Olympian. And here you are, uncle, as a Soufflé Mortimère! Why, I feel myself shining with reflected glory!"

"So indeed you may, sir," replied Uncle Jack. "I can tell you it is an honour not earned in the easy-going fashion of your D.S.O.'s and C.M.G.'s. No amount of interest or wire-pulling will help you at the 'Owl's Nest.' You just stand on your own bare merits while Ferdinand turns his searchlight on you. Many have been qualifying for years to get on this list of honour! Now let us order our dinner."

He turned to the waiter. "A little dinner before the theatre—we omit therefore the soup on the principles taught by our chief. Now, Dan, choose the fish. We'll give you a chance of showing what latent possibilities may be in you."

"Filet de sole," answered Dan promptly.

"Very good. Shall it be Filet de sole Heredia? Or does one of its distinguished rivals tempt you more? Here we have Grand-duc Vladimir—Victor Renault—Loie Fuller. Each name suggests a new charm."

"Loie Fuller." Dan did not hesitate.

"And now for the *entrées*. Shall he go on, Betty, or will you choose?"

But I insisted that Dan should continue. It was such a mercy to get some one of such unwavering decision.

"There is the Noisette de Pré-Salé Bodley, or the Filet de Lièvre Arnold White. Ferdinand's reputation might rest solidly on either of the *entrées* godfathered by two such distinguished *habitués* of Paris. Or here we have——"

"No," said Dan, "I feel sure Mr. Bodley's noisette ought not to be missed."

"Very good," agreed Uncle Jack. "And that will go well with the *plat renommé* of this studio—the wild duck, which of course you are bound to have on your first visit. We can't

have my *soufflé* this time, as I know Betty won't be satisfied without the Princesse Colonna's '*Fruits assortis*,' and we must have an 'Owl's Nest' salad. So now order the wine. Ah, here is our famous Owl!"

At this moment a little man, with a big square head, bearing a striking resemblance both to the sage of Norway and to the bird of Minerva, entered the room and surveyed us all with a kindly yet penetrating eye.

Uncle Jack rose and shook hands warmly as Ferdinand advanced toward our table.

"My niece has come to make her peace," he said, "and here also is my nephew, who desires the honour of an introduction to the famous artist of the 'Owl's Nest.'"

Dan rose and shook hands, too. Ferdinand bowed. "I am happy," he said, "that Mademoiselle deigns to show me her pardon for my frankness too brutal, and to light up again my humble Nest with her so gracious presence. Monsieur is the brother of Mademoiselle, or, happily, the cousin?" he inquired of Dan.

"Happily the brother, Monsieur Ferdinand," answered Dan.

"Monsieur is the fortunate in either case," answered Ferdinand, "but pardon me that I permitted myself for an instant the hope that

Monsieur might have had, as the cousin of Mademoiselle, the opportunity of the supreme happiness to become also the *fiancé*."

"Again that he is disappointed, the good Monsieur Ferdinand," I laughed; "better to abandon me as 'old girl' incorrigible. The *fiancé* he voyages round the moon!"

Ferdinand regarded me severely from under his shaggy thatch. "Mademoiselle," he announced, "the life it is an affair serious. Me, if I were Monsieur your uncle, I should arrange for you a handsome marriage with an honourable man here in France. The French make good husbands, and Mademoiselle is already altogether *une française*."

"He must be rich and handsome and have also some talent," I added. "The goodness alone suffices not."

"There you see!" said Uncle Jack, "she requires too much—the affair is too difficult for me. I wish well that you would undertake it, Ferdinand."

"If Mademoiselle will place herself in the claws of the old Owl," he laughed. "But, no; she is, I fear, a *canard sauvage* whom no huntsman has known as yet how to wing. You have, I hope, commanded the *canard sauvage*, Monsieur?" he inquired suddenly of Dan.

My uncle answered we had done so, and rehearsed the menu, explaining that it was a preface to Coquelin in *Cyrano*.

"Ah, there is a creation and a creator, my faith!" Ferdinand's whole face radiated enthusiastic appreciation. "You have brought with you your own sauce, I trust, Monsieur?" he asked Dan.

Dan looked perplexed. Ferdinand shook his finger threateningly at me.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, she knows well how the last time it was that the cause we quarrelled ourselves together. She came, omitting to bring with her the sauce without which all my efforts must be in vain. And why? Because she had been with that one who is my enemy—the enemy also of herself, of all those who would dine well and guard the good health—that invention modern and pernicious—*le fife o'clôque*."

"Well, this time I was strong," I answered. "I fortified myself against the temptation in reminding myself of your wrath, Monsieur Ferdinand. My brother, too, I forbade to touch the cup of poison, and we bring with us, all the three, that sauce you desire—the hunger of the wolf."

The Ibsen-like countenance relaxed, and regarded me benignly. "It is well!" he said.

"Without appetite eat never—it is of all sauces the most important. It is I, Ferdinand, who counsel you without the appetite to depart, and return not until the morrow."

At this point our "Loie Fuller" sole appeared. Ferdinand looked at it searchingly, nodded approval and continued.

"Also remind yourself in eating to combine well the dishes. It is not only on the table they must agree and make pleasure to the eye, one must consider besides how they shall agree together down there, working always in harmonious accord till the end of the journey. Is it not so? Monsieur, your uncle here, he is wise even as the bird of this my nest, but all Englishmen they are not so. Yesterday it was there arrived here two *messieurs anglais*, of robust mien, speaking a tongue the most difficult to comprehend. At last, however, I understood they would command the dinner for four—a dinner colossal, unheard of, Titanic—a real feast of 'Lormère,' as you say in English. 'Thousand thanks, messieurs,' I say. 'It is rather by the Café de Paris or Paillard's you should command this dinner. For me, see you, it is not in my style. I wish you good day, messieurs.' They regard one another, they say, 'He is fool, the old one' —they laugh and depart. Now I talk too much

—I save myself and go to prepare for you the sauce of wild duck!"

"Return to us later, my friend," cried Uncle Jack, and the great man nodded assent as he took up his position behind a small table at the end of the room, whereon was placed the apparatus for his work—apparatus full of suggestion for those who knew, full of mystery for the uninitiated. As his dexterous square-tipped fingers hovered busily over the leaping blue flames of the spirit-lamps while he worked away at the crushing of the ducks, he reminded one of some mediæval necromancer preparing elixirs which should revivify the aged and rebeautify the faded. The same idea was working in Dan's mind.

"Looks just like some old magician," he observed, "working his incantations with blue fire. What is he after now?"

"He is a magician: all true artists are," replied Uncle Jack. "He is making his sauce for the wild duck out of that same gentleman himself. Having sliced him up into fillets, he puts the carcass into that machine which crushes the bones together with other subtle ingredients, and finally pours out at the side of the machine a sauce incomparable, as you will see. If Ferdinand had chosen to move into a fashionable

quarter, he could soon have overtopped any restaurant in Paris. They have often tried to induce him to cross the river, but the wise old owl loves his art too well, and knows he can practise it in the way he likes only in his own unique nest. The fortune of a Rothschild is no temptation to him. Now, is he not a true artist? Eh?"

Dan declared that he deserved a row of medals and the Order of Merit to boot, and showed due appreciation of the "Loie Fuller" sole by maintaining it was endowed with the lightness and grace of its godmother's feet. I felt a sneaking regret for the Heredia myself, being a humble but devout admirer of the exquisite word-music of that poet.

The Bodley noisette proved a worthy successor to the sole, and then came the *plat renommé*, the "savage duck" as Dan called him, and Ferdinand, having no other clients requiring his attention at the moment, returned to our table.

With his scrutinising gaze upon me I mercifully arrested my heedless hand in time. For in my absent-minded way I was just about to offer him one of the gravest of insults and help myself to salt. It would have been all finished between us for that evening had I done so, and

I wanted to make the great man talk, his philosophy being to me even more attractive than his art.

"The duck of Madame la Princesse," he looked toward a cheerful little *partie carrée* at another table, "he is not yet in train for his sauce. I give myself therefore the pleasure to return to you."

"Monsieur Ferdinand," I began, "it is with pain I perceive how on your list of honours my poor sex makes an appearance most meagre. Behold only twice are we acknowledged as being worthy to partake of your creations! Have you an explanation to offer me?"

"Thousand pardons, Mademoiselle! I throw myself at your feet. But, alas, it is only too true. Even to you I dare not lie. The artist who lies, he is a lost one! It is of a rarity lamentable that one finds one of your so charming sex in verity connaisseur, in the highest signification of the term. The psychological reason it is not far to seek. *Les messieurs* they come to a restaurant in general for the purpose grave to eat—but the ladies, no, not—those come in the Society, to laugh, to talk, to make the 'flirt'; incidentally, perhaps, to eat. For example, Mademoiselle herself." He appealed to my two companions whose faces wore that air

of complacent self-satisfaction so quickly called forth in man by any hint of the superiority of his sex. "Mademoiselle lacks not intelligence, all to the contrary, me I have observed well that she possesses of it a quality fine and rare." ("Remember that," I murmured.) "Yet," continued Ferdinand remorselessly, "she regards this most serious act of life as a mere bagatelle. She enters a restaurant, laughs, chatters with her friends, and orders the first thing that jumps her to the eyes. So little attention makes she to the affair in hand that she is capable of swallowing a bad oyster, did one serve it, or any other thing abominable."

"True, too true," groaned Dan.

"Of the *fife o'clôque* I speak not to-day—but *mon Dieu!*" Ferdinand held up both hands with a gesture of abhorrence.

"Oh, I assure you the dinner it is to me an affair very serious when I order it for those two there," I assured him.

But the sage waved my protest aside.

"That is only because being woman, sympathetic and charming, knowing well your world, above all knowing well the man and your power over him, you have realised the importance of giving to eat to the brute that which shall please him. But confess to me now

is it not your first thought in commanding the dinner what will make him pleasure, rather than what is the best for building up the body and giving to the digestion the just measure of work to conserve it in good condition? This idea enters it so much in the head of Mademoiselle? Hein?"

"Bravo! continue always, Ferdinand, my friend! She merits all you say," laughed my uncle. "She gives me what I like to make me of a good humour which lasts perhaps half-an-hour. I eat of the favourite dish too much, unless the eye of my old Perrette be upon me, and behold in consequence a false digestion for twelve hours to follow and a scolding from that same Perrette."

"It is like Eve, thinking never of the consequences," chimed in Dan. "I expect Adam had a false digestion for many years after that uncooked apple. Eh, Monsieur Ferdinand?"

"Perfectly, Monsieur, perfectly! You have reason. We other men, poor imbeciles, we are in their hands, these—Eves, seductive and irresistible. We take from them with gratitude, with confidence, whatever they give to us. Is it not so? Even the apple which shall have for us the consequences so grave, the entire human race endeavours still to expiate in vain."

"Oh, that unhappy old allegory," I remonstrated; "never have I heard it put to so base a use, so distorted out of all shape. Now torment me no more, Monsieur Ferdinand, or I will take some salt, and pepper too, with your duck. Tell me, to change the conversation, what you recommend to your disciples as the best beverage?"

"The best beverage, Mademoiselle, for us others in France is without doubt the good wine of our country—the juice of the grape, pure, fresh, life-giving, warmed and ripened by the sun of the South; it is the gift of the good God himself. That it was which gave other time to the children of France their nature joyous, the heart good and gay. But now, alas, one ceases everywhere to drink the wine, and adopt instead these abominations of the absinthe, the whisky of Scotland, the beer of England and Germany, and all those machines there—inventions of the devil which serve only to destroy the poor Frenchman, thus he loses the nerves, the intelligence, the health—all!"

Dan was looking at the expressive old face with interest. "Do you think then," he asked in his careful French, "that each nation should drink only the beverage produced in its own country?"

"Unhappily for me, Monsieur, I have voyaged but little. With certainty I can speak only of the people of France. But from my Nest of Owl I have observed them as they pass, the men of the other countries, and I perceive always how that which eats and drinks a nation produces very surely the moral qualities corresponding. The history also confirms this fact. For example, witness how a change of diet changes also the character. Is it not true what one says that the meal of oats, the porridge, on which formerly the Scotchman nourished himself, produced a race of men of a strength, a purpose, a virility remarkable? Your Burns, your Carlyle, your Valthère Scott, they were built of the oatmeal, is it not so? But now one says the Scotchman he eats the white bread and the pork, with the result that the brain and the body diminish themselves to the point that, for the Scotchman, he is finished! In your Chamber of Deputies one says it is no more he who rules; though he occupies still some high positions, it is only as a marionette. The Scotchman he lets himself be governed by that one from Birmingham who formerly would have served merely as useful tool, because that one there he has more force, and has also the voice more loud—ah, but yes, one assures me that in verity it is like that!"

"Why, uncle, this is a hotbed of politics into which you have decoyed me for my conversion," cried Dan. "I like much your theory of the effect of diet," he answered Ferdinand; "it is thoroughly Oriental in spirit, as of course you know, for I believe yourself you are somewhat of a Yogi, Mister Bird-of-Wisdom. Tell me now, I beg you, what nourishment produced the peculiar characteristics of the Kaiser Wilhelm? Was it Bratwurst and beer, or has he a French chef?"

"Without doubt, those characteristics which have advertised themselves so loudly to all the world have been accentuated by what eats and drinks that personage extraordinary. Certainly, the Emperor apart, for that is in all the cases a character outside the line, the Germans as a people are the result of their Schweinfleisch, Bratwurst, Baierische Bier, etcetera, even as the ancient Scotchman of his oatmeal. Nourish the Parisian with this diet of the German, and in two, three generation you shall see no longer the Parisian, but in his place will result a being who closely resembles the Teuton."

"Heaven forbid!" cried Uncle Jack fervently. "Do you think the chic little Parisienne would begin to dress herself also like a German frau?"

"The national art, that of the costume in-

cluded, would change very surely," declared Ferdinand. "For all art expresses the character of a nation. The toilette German, is it not so, Mademoiselle, it is obvious, practical, and economical, but lacks, one would say, the charm, the grace, the mystery which attracts and enhances the beauty feminine. The German lady who is coquette, who is artiste, finds in her own country no toilette which can express her temperament."

"I expect that is true of most of our countrywomen, too," observed Dan.

But Ferdinand, rather to my surprise, upheld me in refusing to admit this, and quoted in support our famous ladies' tailors, who, he agreed, have created a costume amazone of the most chic and attractive description. Unhappily, we had to admit *les anglaises* as a nation can hardly be described as chic in their taste. "They seem to prefer the tailor of Germany," said Ferdinand, "if one may judge of those ladies who inundated Paris for the Exhibition."

"It is the price which they prefer," I assured him. "And you also would prefer it, Monsieur Ferdinand, if you were the mother or sister of a dozen children who must be fed and clothed, to say nothing of educated, an item we have left out of our discussion so far——"

"We must begin that another evening," cried

Uncle Jack, rather nervously. "It is time to start for *Cyrano*. Coquelin won't wait for us. I expect not a little of that great artist's raciness might be traced to your *canards sauvages*, Ferdinand."

"*Au revoir à bientôt!*" we cried, in chorus, as the master of the "Nid de l'Hibou" escorted us with due ceremony to the door.

Dan looked thoughtful as we drove along. "He is regretting the allurements of Paillard's or the Café de Paris," said Uncle Jack.

"No, sir, you're off the track this time," replied Dan. "I was tracing my besetting sins to their various foods."

"Sources, you mean," retorted Uncle Jack, who, though he loathes punning in other people, cannot always resist the sin himself.

II

LA TOUSSAINT

ONE hears sometimes that religion is dead, or, at all events, dying, in Paris.

Let any one who is inclined to believe this spend the Feast of Toussaint and the day following it, "le Jour des Morts," in the gay capital.

For a week beforehand the approach of these two days is heralded, and every flower-shop filled with wreaths, crosses, and devices of memorial. The light-hearted, pleasure-loving Parisians devote *en masse* these days to their *chers morts*. Unlike all others, these Festivals of the Church are connected with no social festivities or rejoicings. It is in the churches and the cemeteries that they gather together, rich and poor, old and young. It is on the graves their flowers are laid, and on their knees their songs of hope, faith, and undying love are sung.

The first day, as the name signifies, is set apart to the memory and service of those Blessed who, according to Dante, are circling

upwards through the education of Purgatory ever nearer and nearer to the perfect joys of Paradise. The second day, All Souls, or, the Day of the Dead, is devoted to all those, whether saint or sinner, who have passed into the Great Unknown.

Early on the morning of the 1st of November bells begin to ring from all church towers in the city, calling every one to attend the masses for the souls of the departed. Nearly all shops are closed, except those for flowers or refreshment.

In the ancient church of St. Gervais the grand old music of Palestrina's "Messe Solenelle" echoes through the dim grey arches, sung, as the composer intended, by the voices of the choir unaccompanied by organ or other instrument.

In Nôtre Dame and St. Eustache, Verdi's beautiful requiem consoles and raises many a sorrowing heart; while at the great solemn Madeleine, as inseparably associated with funerals as St. Philippe du Roule is with weddings, one hears the mournful strains of Dvorak as the big doors draped in black swing to and fro.

From earliest dawn the whole city is astir in every direction and the traffic is blocked, as on the occasion of the election of a new President or a visit from the Czar.

And among all these moving thousands it is rare to find any who are not wending their way towards the churches or cemeteries. For not only the *chers morts* of each one personally, but the *chers morts* of France, the patriot, the soldier, the artist, the victim even, are brought to affectionate remembrance at this time. A bond of real brotherhood, knitting together all Frenchmen, is created by this great Feast of Memorial for which in England we have no counterpart; All Souls and All Saints days in their vital meaning being unknown and unacknowledged by our nation as a whole.

But here in France, on these grey autumn days of falling leaf and wintry wind, this great wave of religious sentiment, implying as it does the assurance of so great a hope, sweeps along in its course even Anglican, Lutheran, and Jew. If they do not permit themselves to pray for their "dear dead," at least they desire to show for them the same loving remembrance as the Catholic. So they too join the pilgrimage to Père Lachaise, Montmartre, Mont Parnasse, and Passy, where each have their corner in God's acre, bearing in their hands also the wreaths, crosses, anchors, and pots of flowers, for, as Mémé concedes, "Their Dead are they not just as dear though, owing to lack of all outward

celebration of their memory, sometimes less well-remembered."

My brother Dan and I found ourselves also affected by this spirit of pilgrimage. We began by wending our way first to Montmartre, with whose shady alleys I am familar as with some dear well-known garden. It is a favourite Sunday drive of Mémé's, and, in days gone by, I have often accompanied Madame Vollet, and assisted in carrying the pots of flowers and wreaths to the magnificent *tombeau* of Alphonse Vollot, that monument, "impossible to pass unnoticed," on which her name is now inscribed beneath that of her adored spouse. Uncle Jack, too, has his corner there in the English quarter, a quiet grave which he keeps bright with flowers of remembrance all the year round and rarely omits to visit himself once a month.

Passing the grave of Heine, in gratitude for that legacy of incomparable songs he has left us, I lay my offering of last roses of summer on the dark stone bearing the simple record of his name, "Henri Heine"—and that sardonic smile which, according to Matthew Arnold, sums up the essence of Heine's personality still seemed to hover round the place as some withered autumn leaves fell on my roses.

But it was to Père Lachaise that Dan was

chiefly intent on going, neither he nor I ever having been there.

Passy, being so far in the opposite direction, we did not attempt on this occasion. And I must confess the interest to me there centres entirely in the tomb of poor little Marie Bashkirtseff. Gazing through the grating into that chapel of pathetic relics of the blossoming young life, one seems to be looking into the inmost recesses of a broken heart—broken not by some great passionate love which made it worth while to have lived, but by disappointment and shattered hopes, by vain beating of the wings against inevitable Destiny, by the inability to grasp and hold in a frail human hand the Ideal in Love, in Art, or anything.

And that name on the wall outside, engraved by the dying hand of the great artist who loved her—"Bastien Lepage"—how eloquently the feeble scratching on the marble seems to speak of his hopeless attempt to make his love any more to the capricious child of genius than a mere indenture on the surface of her heart. What a contrast this memorial of two modern lovers to those two who rest on the hill of Père Lachaise, and whose love comes down to us through the long centuries like a strong bright ray from a distant star. Some one has said that

the poetry of Doubt, which is so large an ingredient of all modern poetry, lacks the virility and strength to live long. Surely it is the same with the Love of Doubt. Will any one sing the loves of Marie Bashkirtseff and Bastien Lepage six hundred years hence?

Our attempt to reach Père Lachaise by the Metropolitan threatened to last all day, so great was the block in the traffic. At the best it is a means of locomotion impossible to enjoy on account of the entire absence of any ventilation, and the overpowering disinfectant which, in killing the microbes, goes near to killing the passengers too. On this occasion the one compensating fact, that you travel with remarkable speed, being conspicuously absent, there seemed no reason for remaining in the bowels of the earth inhaling pernicious draughts of antiseptic and suffocated by the travelling millions.

At the Louvre station we got out, therefore, and hired a reluctant fiacre—reluctant, at least, until we agreed to take the *cocher* by the hour for the whole afternoon at double the tariff due. Then the horse, which he had assured us was a poor beast incapable of covering half the distance without falling dead in the road, suddenly cheered up, and under the changed conditions and additional hope of a good *pour-boire* showed

every sign of being able to go on to Versailles if it would make us pleasure. I have often noticed the extraordinary influence of additional francs and *pour-boires* upon the Parisian horse. He will prick up his ears, cock his tail, and often straighten out a lame leg, when assured by his master that the arrangement is satisfactory. And there is one condition I never fail to include in all arrangements which perhaps may also have weight with my four-footed friend, *i.e.* that I give not a sou of *pour-boire* to the *cocher* who uses his whip otherwise than as an encouraging crack in the air. Never yet have I met the horse who did not respond nobly to this arrangement, in spite of the *cocher's* frequent warning, that this animal here had the head of a calf added to the soul of a pig and the malice and cunning of a dog — impossible, in fine, to conduct the conveyance except by frequent applications, as I would soon see.

On arriving at Père Lachaise we left our horse and man to refresh themselves, and, armed with bunches of chrysanthemums, roses, and violets, joined the long stream of pilgrims ascending at the main entrance. It was then for the first time I found I had left Dan's Baedecker three stages beneath the surface of

the earth in that "maudit" Metropolitan. On thinking it over I remembered just how this happened. I had taken the guide-book from Dan and begun reading up the "famous tombs," and it was Béranger the poet who had set wings to my thoughts. Baedecker states curtly that "he shares a common grave with Manuel the popular deputy." No comment, no explanation is given. Manuel died 1827, Béranger 1857. From the sweet singer and dreamer to the "popular deputy" seemed a far cry, the adjective so hopelessly discounted the deputy. Why, then, a common grave? And wondering why and how and why again, of course the irresponsive Baedecker slipped unheeded from my fingers.

When I explained this to Dan he quite saw how perfectly natural it was, but he gave vent to an expressive whistle when we came to that perplexing summit from where a perfect star of avenues radiate out on every side. We were as lost in that bewildering labyrinth of trees and tombs as the Babes in the Wood. Of course we might ask our way, and we might possibly find a guide—we tried to take a hopeful view, but the main difficulty was to know what we wanted to see. I could remember only Béranger and the tomb of Abélarde and

Héloïse. The crowd were like ants on an ant-hill, each busily going his own way. After three futile attempts I gave up Béranger, since, though his name was known, no one remembered where his grave was to be found. I then tried Abélarde and Héloïse. The old man I addressed shook his head and gave me a discouraging *weis nicht*. "His nose betrayeth him," said Dan; "this must be the Jews' corner; better try the first pair of likely-looking lovers."

But lovers appeared to be singularly scarce among those moving thousands. The nearest approach to what we sought was a young woman whom we rightly judged to be one lover. She wore the long black veil of a recent widow, and with her was a tiny child in black frock and large white collar. Between them they bore an anchor of fresh violets. "Ah, yes," she knew the tomb I sought. "But, yes, she knew it well!" with a sigh that spoke volumes of reminiscence. "Monsieur and Madame had far to go—very far. One must descend to the left, then mount to the right—take again the third road to the left which conducted straight into the Avenue des Puits. There it would be well to inquire again, but one was not far at that point there."

She regretted she could not herself accom-

pany us, but *le petit* was unable to make a long course, and she must care well for him now ; he was all she had left to her down here."

I noticed the soft brown eyes fixed themselves resolutely, not on the child, but on the anchor of violets.

We thanked her and set out to follow her instructions. All at once I spied a uniform which suggested to me a possible *guardien* or guide. Dan, like all Englishmen I ever knew, has a singular aversion to asking his way, so I boldly accosted the official. No, he was no *guardien*, but a *gendarme*. The majesty of the law looked down upon me with severe dignity not unmixed with contempt for my ignorance. Then, as I turned away obviously discouraged, he admitted the belief that a *guardien* found himself at the corner of the grand avenue on the right.

A small, spare, little gentleman with snow-white hair and very black garments, who had been listening attentively to my conversation with the stately *gendarme*, came forward at this point, and, raising his hat with an old-fashioned bow, which included both Dan and me, he said if he could be of service as *cicerone* to monsieur and madame it would make him the most great pleasure. For the rest, he knew every corner

of this cemetery like his pocket, living as he did in this quarter. "Permit only," he added, "that I render myself at the tomb of my *belle-mère* for a few moments—it is a duty I permit myself to fail in never."

I accepted his services gratefully, and with another bow he left us, promising to return shortly.

"Who have you picked up?" inquired Dan. "He is not a guardian, is he?"

"He is going to show us everything we ought to see, and he knows this place like his pocket," I assured him. "I have picked up not only a perfect Baedecker but a 'good Samaritan,' willing to give us of his bountiful store of knowledge. He has only gone for a minute to pay his respects to his *belle-mère*."

"But we can't take up his time like this," Dan demurred. "And he doesn't look the sort one could pay. It is preciously awkward, I think."

"He loves having his time taken up," I said. "He is feeling rather lonely this afternoon. You can repay him in the same way as you would repay the Dean or Archdeacon of Westminster were either of them kind enough to show you round the Abbey. *Voilà tout!*"

"*Voilà tout*," murmured Dan, and added

something quite inappropriate about never knowing what women would do next.

"He looks pretty old to have a *belle-mère*," he remarked, as we saw our friend coming towards us.

"He will have her as long as he lives—his obligations did not cease with her life here," I explained, pointing to the imposing tomb of the *belle-mère*. For in the tone of my new friend when speaking of his *devoir* there was no mistaking the lasting sentiment of respect and duty that old lady had managed to inspire.

This is by no means an uncommon thing in France. The gracious and stately appellation of *belle-mère* is fraught with awe-inspiring significance for the *gendre*. A mother-in-law across the Channel is in no way an equivalent. And the manner in which the French novel and stage ridicule and jest with this relationship is but too often a feeble attempt to laugh off the very real awe underlying the feeling of the son-in-law. Whether or no this conduces to the general peace and well-being of the community I do not feel myself in a position of sufficient experience to say.

On returning to us, this dutiful son-in-law remarked simply: "For seventeen years never have I failed. My daughter to-day is suffering

and could not accompany me. I ask your pardon for the delay. You are strangers? You desire, therefore, to visit those tombs most renowned?" he asked us.

"If you please, Monsieur," answered Dan promptly. "Thiers, Molière, Chopin—all those gentlemen so distinguished."

"And Abélard, Héloïse, Béranger, and de Musset also," I added.

"*Eh bien c'est ça,*" said our guide. "Since we find ourselves already at this point, we will visit all in their order, and make the tour, finishing by the Chapel of Thiers and the tomb of de Musset, which find themselves at the Avenue Principale—is it not so?"

We assured him we placed ourselves with the utmost confidence in his hands.

To give the smallest idea of the route we took would be as impossible as to find one's way through the labyrinth of Fair Rosamund without the ball of silk. In and out of the trees and tombs we wound our way, blindly following our guide, and listening as he told us stories grave and gay of this great and distinguished company, among whom he loved to roam.

"It is all mine this noble society," he said. "When the world where it must be that I dwell oppresses me with its aspect mercantile and

mesquin—with its ideas limited, its standards low, I save myself here. The spirits of the noble dead meet me beneath these trees. They whisper me in the ear words of consolation and hope. They remind me how they too suffered and wept during the life down here. Above all," and his voice trembled a little, "the gentle spirit of my spouse greets me here ; for though she died in the country of the South, and her body reposes there already some twenty-five years, yet at the tombs of all the lovers there I find her. There we recognise each other as in the days of the youth."

Generals, statesmen, poets, musicians—we visited a great and goodly company—among whom I remember La Fontaine in his sarcophagus, Molière, Tamberlick, the sweet singer, whose angel strews symbolic and never-fading flowers, Chopin with his mourning muse, Cherubini, Lefebvre, Napoleon's great general, whose fame rests now on being the husband of the fascinating *blanchisseuse* Madame Sans-Gêne ; Thiers, in his enormous chapel, crowning the hill and overlooking the city of those children of France he loved and served so faithfully—all these and many more we saw. But it was by the graves of the poets we lingered longest. Alfred de Musset was one specially dear to the

heart of our guide. He pointed out the overhanging willow, and repeated by heart the lines in which the poet requested this tree might be planted on his grave:—

"Mes chers amis quand je mourrai
Plantez un saule au cimetière.
J'aime son feuillage éploré,
La paleur m'en est douce et chère
Et son ombre sera legère
À la terre où je dormirai."

"This verse is from a poem," said our guide, "dedicated to a young English girl who called herself 'Lucie.' De Musset, it appears, heard her sing a song of the old times by your poet Shakespeare of a willow. And, listening to the song of this young girl, he experienced for her a love exquisite and poetic in the manner sudden of the poet. That song of the willow was even as is the song of the swan who dies—the young girl died a short time after. The heart of the young poet was bruised. For this cause he desired when he should die that the willow of Mees Lucie should bend its weeping branches over his grave."

But from the poem on his tomb I am afraid de Musset had long forgotten all about Desdemona's willow and also Mees Lucie; and no wonder, since she died when both she and the

poet were in their teens. That one he calls on to "remember," was it George Sand or another ?

> "Rappelle toi quand sur la froide terre
> Mon cœur brisé pour toujours dormira,
> Rappelle toi quand la fleur solitaire
> Sur mon tombeau doucement s'ouvrira."[1]

The mystery of Béranger sharing a tomb with Manuel, "the popular deputy," was made plain at last. "Between these two," said our guide, "there existed the friendship of a David and a Jonathan. And though the Jonathan preceded his friend thirty years, yet never did the David-heart of the poet forget. The bond which drew them to each other it was love of France. The one he served her as a soldier and a deputy, the other as a national poet!"

It is an enormous monument the countrymen of Manuel have erected to him, and David, the artist, has added two bas-reliefs, placed side by side—the one of Manuel in the vigour of youth, the other of the poet as an old man.

Under the name of Béranger we read, "Poète National," and the words, "Je désire être inhumé dans le tombeau de mon ami Manuel."

"There was another reason also which caused the poet to desire above all this corner. Come and I will show you."

[1] A translation from Goethe.

We followed him a short way down the narrow winding pathway to another tomb—a plain stone overshadowed with trees.

"This is the grave of Lisette," said our guide, the faithful friend of Béranger, even to the end of a long life."

"Madelle. Judith Frère," we read on the old stone. "Fidèle amie de Béranger. Décédée à Paris le 8 avril 1857 à l'age de 79 ans."

Was ever such a record of fidelity? The poem testifies so eloquently to this rare quality in man, to say nothing of poet and Frenchman, that I copied it down, much to the delight of our guide :—

"Près de la beauté que j'adore
Je me croyais égal aux Dieux,
Lorsqu'au bruit de l'airain sonore
Le temps apparut à nos yeux.
Faible comme une tourterelle
Qui craint la serre des vautours !
Ah par pitié lui dit ma Belle
Vieillard epargnez nos amours."

"Levez les yeux vers ce monde invisible
Où pour toujours nous nous réunisons."

"And it was strange, was it not," said our friend, "that these ancient lovers, so faithful, died in the same year? Béranger quickly followed his beloved 'Lisette,' who, as you may

see from the dates, was two years more old than he—that which proves how the love will triumph over all things. The waters quench it not, and the old age itself kills it not. But," he added with a sigh, "few souls are capable of experiencing this love here."

Dan looked at the curiously dried-up old face, with its keen, slightly ironic expression, and whispered to me :

"You may depend the old fellow is a poet himself. Probably a member of the Academy —ask him."

But whether he was or no I had no opportunity of then finding out, for at that moment our indefatigable guide led us to where the figure of a young man lay full length under the trees, his head thrown back as if asleep. For this was Renoir, the young journalist, shot by the hand of Prince Pierre Napoléon for his too daring visit and too daring principles. In his half-open hand was a bunch of fresh violets, while on his breast lay some rosebuds. Renoir is not forgotten.

Nor is that other victim of even sadder fate, Lesurques. Guillotined, because, though his condemnation was discovered at the last moment to have been an error arising from his likeness to another man, it was considered too

late to change the sentence already signed and sealed.

"Victim of a fatal human error," his tombstone records. "Pray for his soul."

If one may judge from the flowers and wreaths, never, so our guide told us, absent from his grave, his fellow-countrymen have at least tried to atone for the sins of their fathers by fulfilling this injunction. When I suggested that prayers were more needed for the darkened souls who were capable of such a "fatal human error," our guide reminded me that those there must work out their expiation in purgatory; *le bon Dieu* would see well to them. But for the victim the prayers which would bring him the sooner to the joys of Paradise were a debt owed by his fellow-countrymen who had so deeply wronged him.

No one could help sympathising with this sound doctrine of "Mrs. Be-done-by-as-you-did." And our friend was much interested when we told him how in having the story dramatised Sir Henry Irving had found it impossible to present the real historic tragedy, but had been obliged to change the end and save the innocent man, the justice-loving English public refusing to endure the play otherwise.

Among the most pathetic of all the graves

were two sad, grey stones without name, date, or record of any sort. Yet both were well-remembered on this day of the Toussaint. One had a wreath of laurel tied with a ribbon of tricolour. It was the grave of the unfortunate Maréchal Ney. Forbidden all record on his dishonoured grave, shot as a traitor by the Bourbons, yet dwelling in the memory of many of his countrymen as hero and victim.

"For me," said our guide, "I am good Republican. But I believe the Maréchal he was sincere, and the sincerity, like the charity, makes much pardoned."

The other nameless grave was that of Marguerite Gautier. A pathetic little bouquet of white camellias, tied with a scarlet ribbon, spoke of such intimate sympathy one could not help feeling our friend was divining truly when he said :

"See how the hand, without doubt, of another *Dame aux Camélias* has laid here the favourite flowers upon the tomb of her sister!"

"Why is there no name?" I asked. "Marguerite, at least, they might have written to mark the spot where she lay."

"It was her own desire to be forgotten. She had suffered so much, see you, that poor Marguerite Gautier. Even as when one leaves

this world to enter the convent one receives a new name on beginning that new life, so, without doubt, she also desired on leaving this world to cease altogether to exist as Marguerite Gautier, and to live only with that new name the good God will give to her in the life awaiting her elsewhere. May her soul repose in peace! Her sufferings and her love were much more great than her sin."

"It is to be hoped his mother-in-law cannot hear him," murmured Dan. "From the look of her *tombeau*, I don't believe she would endorse those sentiments."

We parted from our guide at last, with a promise to show him all the famous tombs in London, including the mummies in the British Museum, whenever he should resolve himself to undertake the journey, and, above all, the "traversing" of the water.

On exchanging cards we discovered that our friend was a *huissier*, or auctioneer!—in such strange habitations may you find housed the soul of a poet!

On our return home we found Uncle Jack, Mémé, and her incorrigible grandchild, the *p'tit chou*, just back from Montmartre.

"We amused ourselves well," said the *chou*. "Me, I placed a bouquet superb upon the tomb

of the poor Pépé—Mémé, also, she placed the purple pansies, which were the flowers the most favourite of Pépé. Mémé she poured out some tears upon the tomb of Pépé—but, yes, some big tears. Me also I cried in that cemetery. I made a scene. So loud I cried there came a crowd who listened to me—was it not so, Mémé?"

"But hast thou not shame, my child, to remind us of thy conduct so deplorable?" answered Uncle Jack, with an air of mock condemnation which did not for a moment deceive his cute godchild.

"But no, but no—I will not that one forgets—I will that thou remindest thyself of the promise thou didst make to me—eh! Hast not forgotten thou?" The *chou* raised a warning finger, and gave her victim a certain sideways glance, such as I have seen Zuleika, the Persian cat, levy on my simple-minded terrier Jack.

"I swore to thee a promise, little naughty one? But this becomes really too strong! It is a veritable tyranny! What was this promise, for example?" Uncle Jack assumed an independence of spirit he was far from feeling.

"Thou didst promise me a tomb grand and superb, even the same as that of Monsieur

Vollot!—is it not so, Mémé *chérie*, when I made a scene and cried strongly on the tomb of my poor Pépé, the Uncle Jacquot he promised all that I would?"

Mémé, appealed to, sighed deeply.

"Alas, my poor little one, but why tease all the world thus because of thy tomb? The good God has given thee all to render thee happy here on earth. Rest thou content."

"But me I desire also when I die a fine tomb, even as that of the little Alphonse, where he will repose himself with his family," answered the *chou*. "Without that I rest not content. A handsome chapel, with a picture of the sainted Madonna and the little Jésu. Some flowers of wax also, and some beautiful crowns of beads all around the altar. Ah, but it will be ravishing, and all the world will admire that tomb there!"

"The history of this affair behold it." Mémé turned to us. "Jacqueline, the poor little darling, she asked where she would be placed when she came to Montmartre. Thinking to please her, I pointed to a small corner near the tomb where I myself hope to rest some day. But instead of pleasing her, all to the contrary, this idea quite upset her, and she demanded of the Uncle Jacquot if it were true

she should have but a tomb small and mean. It appears that the family of the little Alphonse possess a chapel colossal at Père Lachaise, of which he has boasted. Her idea in revenge was, therefore, to possess one resembling that of Monsieur Vollot."

The *chou*, listening attentively during this recital, added by way of comment :

"Even a little larger—yes ?"

"We shall see—yes, yes," said Uncle Jack, while Dan seized her as she darted past him, and began a story of a bad little cabbage who, as a punishment for crying for a big tomb, grew so enormous not even the Trocadero could contain her.

"It is not a real story that—it is made expressly to teach me to be good—I listen no longer," she broke in impatiently. "*Sacré tonnerre !* with those stories there one bores oneself ;" and having fired off a strictly forbidden expression she escaped to her Julie, with whom we heard her presently singing in the distance in tones of fervour a devout hymn, some twenty verses long, of which the rather doleful refrain was :

"Les pauvres morts, faut bien leur apporter des fleurs !
Les pauvres morts, qui ont tant de douleurs."

III

UN MARIAGE MANQUÉ

"*Parbleu!* This time here it is 'the thief who has encountered the thief and a half!' *hein, maman?*"

This is how Gaspard de Fleury summarised the whole affair, adding indifferently :

"For me, I am quit of it for the fright."

Since *le petit*, as his mother the gay Marquise still insists on calling him, in spite of his fourteen stone and thirty-five years, was on this occasion both hero and victim, not even his mother could deny his right to an opinion.

Weeping a discreetly harmless little tear into her fine cambric handkerchief, the Marquise declared the hour had arrived for her to quit a world where a son, whose happiness was the unique thought of his mother, could throw her in full face a reproach so poignantly cruel. Was it her fault that the marriage had failed to consummate itself? Who could have imagined that such foreign *canaille* were permitted to pro-

menade themselves in good society? Such a revelation of perfidy and hypocrisy never was in this world. For that person Meeses Chadderveek, she who was the accomplice of her compatriots so infamous, let one never dare pronounce her name again!

I was thankful my dear Mme. d'Aville had no finger in the seething *pot au feu* caused by the *mariage manqué* of Mme. de Fleury's son; she and the gay Marquise are such old friends it was really providential she happened to take no part in promoting the engagement, for Mme. d'Aville is an inveterate match-maker, Uncle Jack says all nice women are; but on this occasion the Marquise even thought she detected a lack of her friend's usual enthusiasm over such affairs, and only on being so reproached did Mémé, as we all call Madame d'Aville, force herself to look on the bright side.

"*Mon Dieu!*" Mémé had confided to me with an expressive *moue*, "but it needs many dollars to reconcile one to that young girl for a daughter-in-law. One seeks in vain for any distinction, any charm, any sensibility. For my Gustave never would I have considered her had she possessed the dot of a Rothschild! The error that we commit, we other Parisians it is, that we accept all the Americans without classi-

fication, without discrimination, if only they possess sufficient of the dollar! That which to the best class of that nation must be very annoying."

Still, when she heard how eminently satisfactory was the number of those same dollars, and with what complacency her friend contemplated the match, Mémé moderated her fastidiousness.

"After all, Gaspard de Fleury, it must be avowed, was on his side a boy not too easy to marry, with his tastes for the life half savage of the country, his intelligence *bornée* and his appearance rude."

Of course, had he possessed a fortune or a big position, these defects would count as nothing. But his fortune had been dissipated by one cause and another till there remained no great thing, and this would be but slightly augmented on his mother's death, all her available capital having been sunk in an annuity.

"I shall leave Gaspard more than enough for his simple tastes," the Marquise had justified herself to her friend, who strongly discouraged the annuity. "And it would be but the folly pure to cramp down the full life so necessary to me in order to place on *le petit* a burden of responsibility insupportable to one of his temperament! For the rest I shall make for him

a fine marriage one of these days—thou wilt see!"

The determination to marry *le petit* with as little delay as possible had been the result, when paying one of her flying visits to La Vendée, of a conversation with M. l'Abbé, who shared the solitude of the Château with his former pupil. A conversation in which the simple Abbé sat quaking in his shoes, vainly endeavouring to parry the searching questions of the Marquise, who soon elicited all she needed by pretending to know what she but dimly suspected. It was the sudden fear that the rural tastes of her son might lead him into a marriage with the buxom village beauty Jeanneton which decided her line of action. She had one moment of atrocious suspense, caused by the idea that already he might have done so. Precipitating herself upon the terrified Abbé, Mémé declares the Marquise literally shook the truth out of him.

But heaven be thanked he had not dared to connive at such a crime, though in his terror he admitted how nobly he had resisted every inducement to do so.

"So this is a pretty little basil-pot I discover, and only just in time," cries the Marquise. "Hé presto! to marry Jeanneton to the first yokel who will take her, and remove M. le Mar-

quis to the shelter of his mother's wing in Paris."

"The grass sprouts not beneath the feet of Renée de Fleury when she desires to make affairs to march—my faith, but she would have made a famous field-marshal! In her hands her son, the Abbé, the village girl, and her parents, they were but pawns on the chess-board." Mémé cannot withhold her admiration for skill, even when used unscrupulously.

To part with two thousand francs, that did not sing to our Marquise, I promise you; but though she suffered as if one tore her out the teeth, yet she hesitated not. She sends for the parents of the girl, who rent a small farm on the estate. "My friends, it is desirable you marry Jeanneton without delay. If you accomplish this duty by the end of the month I will provide for her a *dot* of two thousand francs. *Voilà*—me, I have said it—you may count on me! If the marriage takes place next month I give but the half. M. l'Abbé, he will make known to me how the affair marches. Never does one deceive me. Monsieur my son and me, we depart on the instant for Paris, where Monsieur my son is about to marry himself in a manner suitable and worthy of his position. This announcement will, I know, give pleasure to all

our brave, honest people here. Good-day, my children, my good friends."

The worthy couple realised there was no alternative. Mme. la Marquise was she who must be obeyed. Within the month Jeanneton became the wife of the miller's son. "I would have preferred her placed out of sight of the Château," said the Marquise, "but after all, the essential is, she is married—*Mon Dieu!* what anxieties we other mothers endure for our children! Now to marry Gaspard *le malheureux!*"

When I ventured to remark to Mémé that it seemed a thousand pities not to have allowed *le petit* to marry his Jeanneton, Mémé replied severely:

"In England you make those marriages there, I know it. One says that those of your young nobles who do not marry themselves with the rich American, present to their mothers the daughter-in-law plucked from the theatre, the *café chantant*, even! In France a man has for his mother too much consideration, too much respect to choose among these persons his *wife*. The place one time occupied by his mother, that can alone be filled by one worthy to be her successor. In France the mother is for the son always an object honoured and sacred."

Mémé said this with such an air of unques-

tioned superiority, I felt that only as the mother of a French son could I present the other side of the shield with any conviction. According to Mémé no woman has any real rights to speak of except the mother. Whatever I say I am told to wait till I am the mother of a son, a French son of course.

But to return to *le petit* and his famous *mariage manqué*. On hearing that a marriage, excellent and suitable, had been decided for his Jeanneton, he growled and swore by all his deities he would not permit it. Growling and swearing still, he was next morning whirled off to Paris with the admonition to have confidence in the mother who adored her little *coq;* a bride was awaiting him, rich, beautiful, young, and seductive, and with her *dot* all would walk at a marvel.

It was to my uncle's American friend, Mrs. Hamilton P. Chadwick, that the Marquise turned for assistance at this critical moment, the bride at this stage being still to seek. Her ready response to the call of friendship has turned out the worse for her, poor lady.

"Never, never in my life shall I know how to pardon that Meesus Chadderveek. The *rôle* she has played, it is not merely stupid, it is culpable," cries the Marquise.

And Mrs. Chadwick, pouring out her woes to Uncle Jack, says with equal fervour, "Never, never as long as I live will I do any of these French women a kindness again."

Mémé begged me to come on an appointed day and meet Mme. de Fleury, in order, if possible, to pave the way to a reconciliation between that lady and the really much-injured Mrs. Chadwick. But at my first attempt the Marquise turned on me:

"If then your friend Meeses Chadderveek is, as you say, *ma chère jeune amie*, innocent of the *complot*, she is in truth of a stupidity, but a stupidity colossal, unbelievable! No longer should she permit herself to mix with the affairs of this life. She should certainly retire herself in a House of Health for the rest of her days."

"But, dear madame, she was deceived. She trusted these people. She believed they desired the marriage, you also believed them—you also trusted them——" I began.

"Me, I trusted them not, I believed them not! It was Meeses Chadderveek, the one whom I trusted. She, therefore, it is who has betrayed me—*Voilà tout*—by stupidity she betrayed me, if you insist; but the result is the same always—I am betrayed. My poor son also! As for those Americans, they are all

the same ; they come to Paris—people vulgar, badly raised, with the grocers and the drapers for ancestors, the sentiment of honour, of the 'nobleness obliges,' they know it not! They come to catch our poor sons, they tempt them with their vulgar dollars, and the poor boys who, alas! are many of them but pierced baskets, sell themselves to these creatures in default of better. With these Péchinnes it was even worse, for they by a deceit crawl into our best society under the false pretext of making a marriage. When I think of that account at the florist—those bouquets, those carriages not yet paid for—willingly would I place the foot on the neck of those vipers. *Mon Dieu!* How they prettily fooled me! How I worked to push that *canaille* there into the cream of the society! At the Vente de Charité I even introduced to the Duchesse de Montagnac that little adventuress as the *fiancée* of my son! Just heaven!"

It was at the Duchesse de Montagnac's Vente de Charité in the Bois de Boulogne where I assisted Mémé with a flower-stall, that I first met Miss Cordelia Peachin and her mother. One involuntarily mentions the two in that order, the mother being so obviously but an accessory to the daughter.

Mémé and I smiled as we heard Madame de Fleury say to her smart friends that day:

"Is she not adorable, my little American? They have a chic, an I-know-not-what, these young girls. They possess in the same moment the ease and *savoir* of the young married woman together with the virginal charm and austerity of a Diana. With what consummate art also they divine the perfect toilette! And then the pretty little *dot, ma chérie,* which makes all to march so well!"

Here the Marquise would lower her voice, but by the uplifted eyes and hands of her listeners one could judge the significance of that *dot.*

"Not astonishing that my son he is enamoured to the folly—*hein!*"

In truth it is marvellous that power of the *dot* for changing the whole aspect of things. Like love itself, it metamorphoses, exalts, glorifies. Nay, more, it can accomplish a greater wonder than love, for it can engender even love itself —whereas love has never yet been able to engender a *dot.*

I could not help reflecting as I heard the eulogies of the Marquise and contemplated the young person who inspired them, that had Miss Peachin been obliged to stand on her own no

doubt most solid merits, they were scarcely those which would have appealed to Madame de Fleury or her aristocratic friends. As it was, I noticed the praise of the friends was rather strained to meet the requirements of their *chère* Marquise.

Madame de Bretelle, as she passed on to our beguiling bouquets of La France roses, whispered, with a shrug of her shoulders:

"*Eh bien, Betty, ma p'tite amie et la fiancée, hein!* What think you? The costume of Doucet or Paquin which has strayed on to the back of a good brave girl of the kitchen! It is treason I speak; but, in truth, beneath all the handsome plumes, behold what I detect—me, I have seen Americans of all the varieties, but never, never a young girl of such a crudity. Happily, however, one says the *dot* is sufficient to make pardoned all the defects!"

I answered that the thing essential had been arrived at, since every one concerned was enchanted—Monsieur le Marquis, Madame la Marquise, Mademoiselle Cordelia, and the excellent Madame Peachin. What more could be desired?

It was curious none of us ever thought of mentioning Mr. Peachin. He did not seem to count; and yet it was he who had laid the foun-

dation stone on which all this edifice of social success and general congratulation were built. It was like leaving Jack out of the story of the "House that Jack built."

We were presented to Mrs. Peachin by Madame de Fleury, who, I think, was a little anxious to pass her on to some one else.

"So glad you both speak English," she began, "my head is all dizzy with so much 'parly-vous.' How do you like my coiffur—I had it done Pompeydor on purpose for this Vontre de Charity. See, I didn't want to disgrace Cordelia with all her smart friends here just dressed to kill. Cordelia, she is wonderful the way she tumbles to a thing. Why, just look at her now; guess you'd say she'd lived among dooks and marquises all her life!"

We admired the coiffure duly, and Mémé replied that American women were quite wonderfully clever and adaptable without doubt.

"That is so, Madam le Barône," agreed Mrs. Peachin, "and I reckon Cordelia will fill her future position with condescension, and I may say grace. Dear knows how her father 'ull take it. He's a curious man is Grosvenor Peachin. Cordelia has let on nothing to him as yet—she's vurry reserved is Cordelia; she says most nothing to me 'bout what she's con-

cluded to do. There's so many after her, see —a lovely girl like that and a pile of money. But I'm all for the Marquis myself, and I've had coronets worked on six dozen handkerchiefs I'm givin' her. Guess that 'ull hurry her up some!"

Mémé listened with growing perplexity to the aspect of the maternal attitude which these words conveyed.

"But you, Madame, you have given the consent — yes? The marriage is an affair well decided or not?" she inquired a little anxiously.

Mrs. Peachin seemed suddenly alarmed at what she might have said or implied. She hastened to reassure us:

"Oh, why, yes, certainly. I've given my consent, and told the Marquise what Cordelia's *dot* will be. But I hold in just letting the young people run their own show—see! The situation is most always mighty delicate, and an outsider's apt to rub the bloom off the peach, I say."

The idea of a mother being described, and correctly described, too, as an outsider, was to Mémé so novel and original an idea, she had no remonstrance ready for the moment.

"How strangely they differ—the customs of

America from those of France!" was all she could ejaculate.

"Guess that is so, Madam le Barône. Waal, I must have some of this young lady's roses," she turned to me. "How many francs did you say, Madmerzelle? Land's sakes, my poor head will never figure that out. I can't get used to foreign money — never shall. Cordelia she reckons like greased lightenin'. Guess you'd better take this louis and give me what's due for the amount. See! I want some flowers to send around to the Countess where we attended a reception last night—so I reckon I'll be trussing two chickens with one skewer, as my poor mother used to say—Vontre de Charity and Madam Comtesse!"

Mrs. Peachin stood by me and saw she got her full money's worth. She had come to spend, but in no spirit of recklessness. She told us she made a point of being able to account for every cent at the end of the day. It was evident, as she moved from one stall to the other, that, though on charity she was bent, she had a frugal mind, and a faculty for reducing all to a strictly business basis, which explained her position of worldly prosperity, specially if her husband listened to her counsel.

"Now I must lay out seven or eight dollars

on the Duchess. Some of those porcelain vases of hers 'ull do finely for my niece—she's going to get married in the fall. Vurry pleased to have made your acquaintance, Madam le Barône — likewise you, Madmerzelle. Hope you'll come around to the Campbell and visit us. Cordelia 'd love to have you see some of her noo gowns and hats. She's just gotten a passmontry opera mantle which is ought of sight—Cost a cool thousand dollars it did!"

It was a great disappointment to me that I could not screw Mémé up to coming with me to see that opera mantle. She insisted on leaving cards when she knew the Peachins would be out. I think she quite resented the opera mantle, and Uncle Jack too seemed to share the feeling after hearing his friend Mrs. Chadwick's tale of woe.

"I want you both to know just how this thing stands," said Mrs Chadwick. "So I'll begin right away and give you the story from start to finish.

"Madame de Fleury came to me one day all boulversed. '*Chère amie*,' she said, 'assist me, I pray you—reasons grave oblige me to marry my son without delay—*trouvy moir une charmante jeune fille parmy vos compatriotes*,' she said—Me, I adore the Amuricans! She put it, see, as strong

as she could, and I, being a good-natured fool woman, promised I'd do my vurry best to help her—Not like one of her own nation I may add, who'd have seen to it they got a good commission out of the job."

Uncle Jack inquired whether any mention was made of the *dot*.

"Why yes—there was vurry particular mention of *dots*, always is," added Mrs. Chadwick drily. "But I've gotten used to that. Waal, the vurry next day who should turn up in Parus but the Peachins. They're Cleveland people, not quite my style, but old friends of my mother's family, and made a pile in train oil. 'We've put up at the Campbell so as to be right near you,' says Cordelia Peachin. 'Poppa'll be off down town most all day doin' the sights, but between you and me, Momma and me ain't dead stuck on doin' sights. What we want is to get into society—real high-toned French society,' she said. 'Guess you can help us some.' I told her it wasn't just as easy as rolling off a log, but I'd do all I could to give her a good time. Directly Mrs. Peachin could get me aside she said quick, 'Guess Cordelia's crazy to marry a count or a marquis, and I'd just love to have one in the family myself—sounds so distangey. Her Poppa'd raise Cain at furst, but

he'd come round right enough, and Cordelia's *dot*, as you call it over here, is secure to her the day she marries, whether the man is a call-boy or a dook. Eugenia Chadwick,' she says, taking hold of both my hands, 'I'll take it vurry kind in you to give this thing a shove off.'"

At this point in the story Uncle Jack groaned sympathetically. "I see, I see, my poor dear friend. Here you were between the devil—may our Marquise pardon me—and the deep sea, both in sheep's clothing, if I may be allowed to mix metaphors under such emotional stress. With your philanthropic nature you were bound to come to grief."

Mrs. Chadwick looked at him sharply.

"Now, Mr. Mortimer, don't you dare laugh at me to-day. I'm just so I couldn't bear it. The most delicate sympathy is what I look to you for, to help me through with this awful experience."

Uncle Jack is not the man to fail when so appealed to, and Mrs. Chadwick, heartened up by his prompt response, continued her story.

"Sunday is the Marquise's *jour*, so I wrote her a 'pity blue' to make sure, the mail in this city being worse than if you lived way out on the prairie." (I noticed everything was wrong with Mrs. Chadwick's usually per-

fect Parus!) "I told her I was bringing along a young girl I thought would be just her *affaire*. See, I did think she was so, and Cordelia Peachin was just crazy to meet the Marquise and her son. Of course I knoo Cordelia hadn't gotten much polish or style on to her—truth is she's homely, is Cordelia, short figear and thick in the waist, and her frocks wur just plain ready-made. But I've seen Amurican gurls come over here raw Western, and get fixed up in a fortnight so you'd never know them from latest Parisian. Put them through the hands of the corsetière, the coiffure, and the modiste, and a miracle is worked on the adaptable Amurican gurl. And though Cordelia's homely, she has youth in her favour —twenty-four I think she is; her mother says twenty-one—and she's just as bright and cute as they make 'em. I didn't take her around to Madame de Fleury till I'd gotten her fixed by Paquin—he understands the Amurican figear like no one else. I said it was *très pressé*, and saw her have three fittings myself. Lord, Eugenia Chadwick, what a fool you wur!"

"Well, I hope Miss Cordelia did you credit?" said Uncle Jack, trying to brush up some crumbs of comfort among the *débris* of disaster.

"Her own Poppa passed her on the stairs

and raised his hat! But it only helped to promote their sly plot, see? I just wish I'd left her to look so homely, the Marquise couldn't have put up with her anyway."

"Ah, I suspect the *dot* formed a halo which would have glorified the homliest face in this case," remarked my uncle.

"I know it," admitted his friend. "That is so. Waal, from that time on the affair just marched of itself. At the Marquise's request I had her and her son meet the Peachins next day at my house at *déjeuny*—Grosvenor Peachin wasn't there, though I asked him—I know now they wouldn't have him come; the man was kept in Egyptian darkness till the vurry last day. He's straight is Grosvenor Peachin, and every cent he has piled up has been gotten on the square. Mrs. Peachin and Madame de Fleury got their heads bobbing together like a couple of mandarins. I could see Penelope Peachin was just tickled to death to think she was talking to a real live Marquise, though it's my belief neither of them understood a blessed word the other one said; they each palavered away in their own tongue, and you could hear a mighty lot of *ravissantes*, and *charmantes*, and *onchonties*.

"When the Peachins left they took the Mar-

quis off driving with them in the Bois. '*Venny, Marquis, venny avic nous,*' said Cordelia. Her French can just take her far enough to make her wishes known. But I saw the Marquis give a start when she said, '*Vous aimey oui?*' He bowed vurry low and said, '*Mais oui, Mademoiselle, plutôt j'adore.*' I thought his mother 'd have died of laughing. She called Cordelia a delicious infant, and said the Amurican gurls were just suited to her son, with their *franchise* and *courage*. The *jeunes filles Françaises* rendered him *gauche* and *timide*, she said. Cordelia wasn't embarrassed any. She's pretty tough for a young girl. 'Why, if that's so,' she said, 'you come right along then. We'll take you around every day *si vous adorey*. I've been wanting a man quite a good deal these ten days, haven't I, Momma? *J'ai beaucoup besoin un homme*, see?' She put in a streak of French here and there, and the Marquis he laughed and said, '*Oui, oui, parfaitement, Mademoiselle, je comprends*,' whatever jumble she spoke. Penelope Peachin's face was just one silly grin all over. It made me tired to see her! Soon as they were gone, Madame de Fleury flung herself right over me and kissed me on both cheeks, calling me as many pet names, as if I'd been her long-lost lapdog. She said the

marriage wus as good as settled ; she and the charming Meeses Péchinne had gotten it all fixed up, and the delicious infant was to pass the next afternoon with her and go to a ball at the Comtesse de la Baume's in the evening. The great difficulty was always Gaspard, who detests, says she, the society and the receptions ; but perhaps his seductive *fiancée* will entrain him with her. Already, as one could see, he followed her like a dog!

"It was nearly a week before I saw any of them again. By that time Cordelia and her mother had gotten such swollen heads through their sudden entry into French high life, that I didn't seem to care if I never saw them again. It was Dooks and Marquises and Counts peppering every phrase. They were out with the dear Marquise and her charming friends most all day and every night. So sorry they hadn't had a minute to come round and see how I was getting along! 'Waal,' I said, 'and when are we going to get the *faire-pars* of the marriage? And what does your Poppa say to it all?'

"I noticed Cordelia looked a trifle embarrassed. She turned on me quite sharply: 'Oh, there's no such mighty hurry,' she says ; 'and as to Poppa, he doesn't worry any about my *beaux*

and *fiancés*, and such things. Why, there's a Vicomte after me too,' she said. 'He called twice yesterday; he's a sight better-looking than Gaspard, and I made Gaspard mad telling him so.' I didn't quite like this. 'Cordelia Peachin,' I said, 'you're in France remember, and they don't understand the freedom of Amurican ways in this country. Tell me straight, are you going to marry this man, or are you not?' 'Oh my, you make me feel as if I was in church already,' she said; 'you scare me to death, dear Mrs. Chadwick. Now don't get rattled, and don't you worry any 'bout poor old Poppa. I know just how to handle him. As to Momma, why she hardly knows which side up she is. She's had coronets embroidered on all my noo handkerchiefs; they look just dandy!' With that off she went to Madame de Fleury and told her I'd been scolding her for her Amurican ways. Of course, the Marquise declared the Amurican ways were absolutely adorable, and she must '*continuez, ma chérie, continuez toujours.*' You should just hear her views on that subject now! There's no word in or out of the dictionary strong enough.

"Waal, that was the last I happened to see of the Peachins, for the vurry next day I was

called away to my sister at Aix, whose husband was dying. It was there I received the Marquise's letter six weeks later. That letter was an ugly jar—I haven't gotten over it yet. Margaret will tell you what my nights are! I'm not as good at reading French as I am at speaking—the handwritings I mean—you need to take a microscope to them. I couldn't make head or tail of that letter till I got the head waiter to read it me. Never shall I forget the kindness of that man, and so sympathetic when he saw how it upset me. '*Partis,*'—that was the word —scorched itself into my bewildered brain—'*Partis pour l'Amérique.*' But 'Why in creation —why?' I kept asking myself. 'Land's sakes, why have they acted so?' The names she gave them I could understand and I could forgive—appeared like they deserved all they got; but the way she went for me, why, you would have thought I'd made that match and eaten up the *dot* before any of them could get to it. On receiving Cordelia Peachin's letter a fortnight later I began to see daylight, though that daylight showed a mean day's work, I am bound to say, on the part of those Peachin women."

Here Mrs. Chadwick produced a letter in a large flowing hand, and read it with the

dramatic emphasis which to me is one of her great attractions. I cannot reproduce Miss Peachin's spelling—I did not see it—only Mrs. Chadwick's pronunciation.

"My dear Mrs. Chadwick,—You'll be surprised to find us flown when you get back to Parus—for I write this, as you see, just arrived at the Waldorf, Noo York. We all regretted extremely not to wish you good-bye and thank you for the really lovely time you helped us have in Parus. I had just the time of my life, and it will be always something to look back on with pleasure and satisfaction" —("Oh, will it?" ejaculated Mrs. Chadwick.)— "though I did find I wus getting into rather a tight place before we left, with that old Marquise and her son. Momma was dead stuck on my having him; she thought it would be so *distangey* to have a real Marquis of a fine old French family—and no doubt that is so, but I'm proud to think I never wavered in my faith to Jonathan Sprague, not deep down I didn't"— ("Oh, Eugenia Chadwick, you Simple Simon you!" moaned the poor lady.)—"though it wusn't till that Gaspard kissed me, I knew for certain how I'd hate to have any man do that except Mr. Sprague. Not that I'd ever have let

Gaspard get further than my finger-tips if I'd known. I'll own up I did just love to have a Marquis kiss my hand—I shall show it around in Cleveland as a curiosity! but as I say, he came up behind me suddenly one day as his mother left the room, and before I knoo what he wus after, he'd gotten his arms around my waist, and wus kissing me for all he wus worth. I *wors* mad, I promise you. I boxed his ears, and then got loose, and shied his last bookay in his face, wet stalks and all. He wus the most surprised man I ever saw! I suppose it's a French custom, but I didn't like it—not the way he did it—and I concluded after that I'd had about enough. But the trouble wus I hadn't the courage to tell the old Marquise. She scared me, though I never let on to any one—she wus so terrubly high-toned—more'n you can say for her son! Guess he's no snowflake either!" —("She should hear what the Marquise says about *her* morals!" Mrs. Chadwick threw in.)

"Waal, to cut the story short, the Marquise began pressing me to fix the day and send out the *fair-pars*. So I said at last, 'Gaspard must settle that with Poppa.' But when I gave Poppa to understand something of the situation, and how he must interview the Marquis and give him the mitten, blest if he didn't turn ugly!

There is a mean streak in Poppa you'd never suspect. He said Momma and me and *you*, dear Mrs. Chadwick"—("Imagine it, me!" groaned our poor friend.)—"had made the trouble, and we'd just have to get ourselves out of it; he wouldn't handle the job at any price. We told him you couldn't help us, having quit." —("I've written Grosvenor Peachin and cleared myself.")—"But nothing moved him, nothing does when he gets that mule's temper on him. When Gaspard called at the hour I fixed, he wus told Poppa wus out and the ladies not at home. Poppa left next day for London on business, so we opened Gaspard's letter to him and just answered it by sending round our cards with 'R.I.P.,' as they do in Parus—we saw it on some cards in a Roo Riverly store."—("'R.I.P.' explains something even the waiter could not make out," said Mrs. Chadwick, "in Madame de Fleury's letter, about a final insult on a *carte de visite*.")—"And we wrote a little note to the Marquise as civil as we could make it with a phrase book and a dictionary. Didn't we wish you'd been there to help us, dear Mrs. Chadwick! Then we made tracks after Poppa fast as we could get. Somehow I seemed to pine for Amurica. Perhaps it wus a letter I had from Mr. Sprague—a sweet lovely letter telling

me he'd been made a partner in the Chicago pig business. Anyhow I took our state-rooms on the next steamer from Southampton, and here we are! Europe seems a long way off now, and if it wusn't for those six dozen handkerchiefs from Charvet's with their cunning little premature coronets, I should think it just a sweet far-away dream those scalps I took in Parus, for the Vicomte he proposed too through his sister-in-law, 'in case the affair with the Marquis failed to achieve itself,' she said! Ain't they quaint, those French? Waal, I guess the wedding present you'd gotten ready for Cordelia the Marquise needn't be wasted anyhow, dear Mrs. Chadwick, for you shall have the *fair-pars* of my approaching union with Mr. Jonathan Hackley Sprague soon as I am good and ready.

"Always vurry cordially,

"CORDELIA DULCEBELLA PEACHIN."

"Oh, the impudence of that girl!" wound up Mrs. Chadwick. "You seem to find it humorous?"—she looked from Uncle Jack to me reproachfully.

We hastened to assure her this was not lack of sympathy; on the contrary, we were both literally overflowing with it.

"I hope Sprague will drink, and beat her," said Uncle Jack fervently.

"They mayn't do it over there," Mrs. Chadwick sighed. "And all the Spragues are teetotallers and strict Baptists."

"Then cheer up," replied Uncle Jack. "I see a probable Nemesis after all for that young lady."

IV

THE DUEL

IT all came about through *ce malheureux yacht*, as Mémé calls it.

Gustave was suddenly fired with the idea not only that he would *faire le yacht*, but become the proud possessor of the third part of one, his *rentes* not admitting of more.

His mother's great dread ever since the advent of the automobile had been that Gustave would imperil his precious life in that form of *le sport*. Her state of mental agitation was such on every occasion when he drove out with his motoring friend, Albert Bouilhet, that Gustave had been obliged to have recourse to secrecy.

Little had his mother dreamt of the danger that was lurking for her on the deep ; as soon would she have prayed her son might be preserved from the balloon.

" Happily that Gustave he has the head feeble, and the heart which quickly turns itself over on quitting the firm earth," she was wont to observe

in deep thankfulness whenever she read of the wild experiments of the æronaut.

Gustave broke the news to her gradually. He is very considerate, specially to his mother, whose solicitude, even when most embarrassing, he never resents as an English son might. He resorts to intrigue occasionally, but that I often observe has in itself a charm for the Latin races. Mémé declares it is the very sauce and spice of life to your true Parisian. He or she will intrigue over the purchase of a postage stamp *faute de mieux*.

"Nothing like the ozone, the air of the sea, to render robust," began Gustave one day. "With this life of Paris one becomes after some time used up like a cinder."

"What has he now in the head, the cunning one?" cried his mother. "Some one disports herself at this moment in the sea at Trouville, *hein!* Or perhaps it is Dinard?"

"She divines all, my mother! Useless to possess a secret. I make my confession therefore. She, my adored, finds herself, then, at Cherbourg. Ah, but, *Maman chérie*, if you could only see her, the little enchantress, as she coquettes with the waves! A grace so seductive! an abandon so delicious! It is enough to make turn the head of the most discreet."

"But *fi donc!* Gustave, my son, be then sage!" Mémé looked in my direction nervously. "Before the young girls one speaks not thus. Betty she will be shocked, very shocked."

"Rather am I pained that a son can show himself so unworthy as to deceive his mother who trusts him," I said. "Dear Mémé, he will try and make you next believe that she is an angel and has white wings—one says, in effect, that she wears them—the wings. A little bird has whispered to me of this lady."

"The uncle Jack he has betrayed me then," groaned Gustave. "A little bird! In truth, it was an old magpie that one! Well, my mother, I make, then, my confession. *Ma belle amie* she has the wings white, yet she is not the fairy in the pantomime. Her wings they fly for me and her heart it throbs for me. With joy she responds to my desire, even the most light! Thing curious, for she is of English origin this one, and the heart of *une Anglaise* I have hitherto found towards me always glacial!"

"Behold him become poet!" I laughed; "but the confession he defers it always."

Poor Mémé regarded us both in deep perplexity. "The wings white," she repeated slowly. "My children, make no longer the comedy. What is it, then? *Ah non!*" she

cried, a sudden light bursting on her, a lurid light. "It is a ship! A yacht! *Mon Dieu, quel horreur!*"

That is how Gustave's mother viewed the new acquisition, the *Mieux-que-tout*—a name Gustave had selected as a side-thrust at me and my sex perfidious and troubling, which he failed not to explain. I retaliated by prophesying that before long he would be applying those two epithets with far more truth to his *Mieux-que-tout.*

Gustave's special friend, Albert Bouilhet, whose hobby happens to be motoring, had vehemently opposed the purchase of the yacht.

"To find oneself on the back, enduring for entire days and nights the accursed 'evil of the sea,' while your bed rests never tranquil, and your clothes and furniture are immersed in the salted water—that does not sing to me, *mon vieux!*"

But Gustave, having taken some trial trips on a small English yacht during a visit the year before to Dinard, had discovered that though, as his mother said, his internal machinery failed him in climbing Alpine heights or ascending the blue in balloons, it served well on the dancing wave. To his proud delight he proved a good sailor; and though his native prudence had prevented his testing his powers very far, he was

determined with due caution to go in for this form of *le sport* altogether seriously and *à l'Anglaise*.

Uncle Jack had been consulted and an expert sent on his recommendation to examine the yacht thoroughly before the bargain was finally concluded, Gustave's two partners trusting all details to him. They regarded a man who had twice made the crossing of the Channel as already half English, and, of course, thoroughly versed in every branch of *le sport anglais*.

Gustave invited his mother to come and inspect her white-winged *belle-fille* before she entered the family, but Mémé replied with a shudder: "Not for all in the world, my son! I have it in horror the sea, as thou knowest. One hour on the *Manche* that suffices me for ten years. Thy *Mieux-que-tout* and me we do well to keep apart, more near we should not be of accord."

Well would it have been could Albert Bouilhet have made the same prudent resolve. A bitter jealousy had sprung up in the heart of Albert towards the *Mieux-que-tout*. He objected to the name as reflecting on himself, though he had not hesitated to call his automobile the "Incomparable," which Gustave might have been equally justified in resenting. Albert complained that Gustave cared now for no friend unless he possessed "the solid heart." Behold to what

point one had arrived! Gustave *le malheureux* he listened neither to the voice of reason nor to the call of friendship! Still the open-handed, easy-going friend was not one to let go lightly, and, great though the sacrifice, Albert determined to accept the invitation and spend a week at Cherbourg on board the yacht, consoling himself that for the moment the *Mieux-que-tout* was firmly moored fore and aft in the harbour, and determining that, if he could compass it, there she should remain.

"Go every day and put courage into the heart of my mother. Do this for me, *ma cousine*, I pray you," said Gustave pathetically, on the eve of his departure.

"Of course I will, you dear, old silly," I answered in English. I always have recourse to my native tongue when I wish to have a bracing effect on Gustave. "One would say you were going to the North Pole at least," I added lightly.

"To be 'dear,' that renders happy—to be 'old' and 'silly,' that spoils all," sighed Gustave. "*Adieu, ma belle moqueuse!*" and kissing my hand, exit Gustave dramatically.

Every evening came a telegram from Gustave to his mother reporting on the events of the day.

For the first three days the despatch varied little. "*Un temps de chien. Impossible de sortir.*" "*Mer orageuse — sommes toujours dans le port,*" &c. Mémé's relief at receiving these messages amounted to rejoicing. Her reply, with which I was generally entrusted the following morning, repeated the invariable refrain: "*Soit prudent, mon fils—ta mère devouée.*"

Then came a day when Mémé, unable to wait for my visit the following morning, rushed over to Uncle Jack's *appartement* after dinner, a telegram in hand, containing the exciting news that the *Mieux-que-tout* had slipped her moorings, and, the weather being superb, had left the harbour for three hours!

"Thank God, they have returned in safety," sighed Mémé, sinking down on a sofa, while I prepared her a fortifying cup of tea, and Uncle Jack held her hand, laughing gently at her agitation, and pointing out where she might reasonably take comfort—namely, in the superb weather, the sound condition of the *Mieux-que-tout*, the life-belts and boat in case of accidents, and, lastly, Gustave's oft-repeated vow to be prudent.

The next day we varied the morning telegram by adding, "*Soigne toi bien, mon fils—ta mère inquiète.*"

Apparently that little flutter of the white wings gave Gustave the desire for a more daring flight. The following evening no telegram arrived: the poignant anxiety of poor Mémé may be imagined. Thérèse Lefebvre spent the night with her mother, and neither of them closed an eye. Early next morning came a long and, on the whole, reassuring message:

"Returned in safety after a sortie of ten hours, unhappily too late to telegraph. Wind strong, perfect for making the yacht. The poor Albert very suffering."

In a letter which followed we learned that Albert and his motor had left Cherbourg, the winds and waves having proved altogether too strong for him. He had desired to put back into harbour in the middle of an exciting "run." Gustave himself would have yielded, but two other friends who accompanied them—one an Irishman, himself owner of a yacht—absolutely refused, threw whiskey in the face of the sufferer to revive him, and insisted on giving Gustave a really practical lesson in yachting.

"*Mon Dieu*, where, then, will they entrain my poor boy?" cried Mémé. "I know them, those Irishmen, reckless and savage, regarding not at

all the human life. Alas, my poor son, he is lost! To-morrow I depart for Cherbourg. I can no longer support this anxiety atrocious."

But next day, as we reminded Mémé, was the last of Gustave's absence, so we persuaded her to endure bravely to the end and occupy herself in preparing a welcome for the hero's return.

He received one that Nansen himself might have envied. Three carriage-loads of friends met him at the Gare St. Lazare, and only the thought of awakening to common sense and daylight next morning withheld me from yielding to the general wave of enthusiasm and playing, just for that night, the part of *fiancée*, won at last by the victorious hero. It was the one thing lacking; we all felt it, I quite as much as Gustave himself. Such a perfect comedy, so exactly like those we played as children, yet here was I dully refusing to accept my *rôle* and join in the game—and all because of next morning! Perhaps I ought to add also a little because of Some One who has never been able to appreciate my playing any but one *rôle*, either in England or France.

But following quickly on the heels of comedy came tragedy—real grim tragedy in cold steel.

Albert Bouilhet, seething with wrath and outraged feelings, had motored back to Paris.

Venting his spleen in speed, his path had been strewn by slain hens and sparrows—some reports add babies. Certain it is that in the environs of Paris he was at length arrested by an alert *gendarme* as a peril to the public, with the result that Monsieur Bouilhet was heavily fined. From his heart he cursed again the *Mieux-que-tout* as the direct origin of all his misfortunes, also those who sailed in the *maudit yacht*, specially of the solid heart, among whom his once best friend on earth was chief offender. That detestable Irishman he consigned to the company of swine, both in this world and the next. "A chattering monkey that one, cracking his ill-timed jokes in the ears of a dying one, and throwing me his accursed whiskey in the face under pretext it would revive!" Albert Bouilhet ground his teeth with impotent rage whenever he thought of that ten hours' sail—that time of the *enfer*. How they had enjoyed it, those others—brutes, egotists that they were—and how they had laughed when the Irishman, mocking himself of the poor sufferer, had given him the "baptism of whiskey," as he called it. And Gustave, who should have arisen and strangled the animal and steered instantly a homeward course, had laughed, laughed like a fool.

Albert's whole being thirsted for revenge. The means he took might appear to an Englishman curiously inadequate. He composed a piece of poetry, or, to describe it accurately, some very bad doggerel verse. Having interest with the editor of a third-rate little society paper, he got it inserted two days after Gustave's triumphal return. Copies were casually strewn about the club which both Bouilhet and Gustave frequent.

I read that poem—of course we all read it—but I regret to say I can remember nothing except the ever-recurring refrain, "*Le Rien-du-tout*,"—so was the "pretentious, nauseating little yacht" designated; and as the author proceeded to pile up his contempt, he included under this heading not only the fatuous owner, his hospitable and courteous host, but the father of this man, in verity also, "*un Rien-du-tout—plutôt un fou*."

When Gustave came to this line he paused, unable to read it aloud; pointing, he handed the paper to Uncle Jack and me, and I noticed his hand trembled.

"For the composition," he said, "it is a folly, it is a *bêtise*, never should I make attention to it; but this phrase here it is an insult to the dead! The name of *Papa*, that no one shall dare pro-

nounce save with honour, with respect. These words here can be effaced only by the blood."

It was then for the first time I learned that the Baron d'Aville, Mémé's husband, had been, for a short time before he died, out of his mind, —the result of a sunstroke while serving in the army in China. Uncle Jack said it was a point on which all the D'Avilles were peculiarly sensitive. Albert Bouilhet happened to be one of the very few aware of the fact, his friendship with Gustave dating from boyhood.

I did my utmost, but without avail, to dissuade Gustave when I found he seriously meant nothing less than a duel. *N.B.*—I had had no experience of duels, and imagined them to be the invariable preludes to funerals.

Uncle Jack thought Gustave had merely spoken under emotional stress, and that the idea of blood had been dissipated with the words. Gustave begged me to let him think so, otherwise it might cause trouble between him and Mémé afterwards.

Uncle Jack and Mémé were, I believe, the only people in Paris who did not know of that famous duel a week before it took place.

The spot selected was the garden of a friend at Neuilly, the friend providentially absent from home. The hour fixed was half-past four A.M.

Gustave's seconds were Monsieur Lemaire, Suzette's husband, and the wild Irishman, both of them delighted to render him this little service.

The preparations for the duel were as elaborate as for the Irish motor race. It was arranged that the whole route between the D'Aville's *appartement* in the Avenue MacMahon and the garden at Neuilly was to be posted at intervals with sentinels, between whom a rapid signalling code had been established. Every man was furnished with a set of flags, each of which bore its own grim significance. A red and white meant "Gustave wounded, but not dangerously." Red unbroken by any white, "Gustave wounded severely." A black flag could bear only one interpretation; but, should the fatality be that of Albert, the signal was to be white merely barred with black. (Thérèse and I flattered ourselves this was a very nice and just distinction.) A sky-blue banner with *fleur-de-lys* centre signified, "Gustave unscathed and victorious"; while bars of green and white announced Bouilhet as wounded satisfactorily, though not fatally.

Gustave himself had nothing whatever to do with the selection of this code of signals, though, of course, he knew and approved of the sentinels.

How otherwise could Thérèse and I be prepared for our course of action with regard to Mémé.

We found no difficulty in recruiting volunteers for our signalmen, notwithstanding the early hour, or late as it proved to some, according to the habits of those who undertook this act of friendship. Had we wished to do so we could easily have extended the route to Calais. Even the old General de Lille insisted on having a post when he heard from his nephew of the arrangement. Of course, Monsieur de Sérignan volunteered, and our old friend the Marquis, now, in accordance with his father-in-law's wish, Duc de la Tour, whose arrival in Paris unfortunately we heard of too late for Gustave to enlist his services as a *témoin*.

Doctor Lefebvre was to occupy the post nearest the house, so as to be in readiness to follow up the signal by his own presence at the bedside of Mémé. His professional duties had precluded him from being eligible for the post of Gustave's doctor ; and though Thérèse regretted it, the *chou* was of the opinion that if any danger found itself *là bas*, her Papa decidedly he must not go. "Who knows," said the *chou*, with marvellous knowledge of the ways of swords, "those swords there they might run on him, the poor Papa."

For the *p'tit chou*, owing to her father having most inadvertently discussed and laughed at the code of signals in her presence, was in the secret, and unfeignedly delighted at anything so dramatic in the family.

She and the little Alphonse gave up playing weddings and christening babies—the latter always arriving ten minutes after the marriage service—and enacted duels, in which they played in turn the enviable *rôle* of "dead one," the victor waving a black signal out of the window.

Mémé came upon them in the middle of one of these scenes, and was greatly concerned to know what had put the strange idea in their heads to play at duels. Upon which the *chou* promptly placed her hand over the mouth of Alphonse with the order:

"Say not a word, thou. The silence absolute, remember, or me I tear thee out the tongue."

"But what have I said, me?" retorted Alphonse, tearfully indignant. "Not even have I pronounced the name——" At which point I rushed in and diverted the impending *dénoûment* by suggesting a new play. But from that time we realised the necessity of keeping Jacqueline and her Mémé apart till after the event.

Thérèse became so nervous she dare not go

near her mother as the eventful day drew near.

"I shall announce all with a high voice—nothing will prevent me—I feel it well. Mémé will be chatting to me, with the heart light and gay, of a reception, of my coiffure, of her new chef; and me I shall reply, 'The Tuesday morning at four and a half, Gustave he fights himself in duel with Albert Bouilhet!' Then Mémé she will have an attack of the heart, a crisis, and she will die of it, very surely she will die of it. Betty, my good darling, rest thou with Mémé—distract her—support her," begged Thérèse, and Gustave joined in the same petition.

The important thing was for me to be at Mémé's house the morning of the duel; for, as Gustave pointed out, if he should be brought home dead, some one must announce it with "much tact" to his mother.

So little have I of the heroic or dramatic in my make-up, that at the prospect before me I felt nothing but heart-sinking. Not that I should have minded running a good sharp rapier through the bulky form of Monsieur Bouilhet myself, or risking with a fairly easy mind the chance of a thrust from his steel, but it was this awful preparation, secrecy, and

anticipation which got on my nerves, to say nothing of the possible prospect of having to break bad news to Gustave's mother about her beloved son. However, there was no help for it, I being the only one whose presence would not excite Mémé's suspicion if suddenly thrust upon her. As it was, Gustave took a box at the Opera Comique the eve of the event, and Mémé, as we had plotted she should, begged me to return home with her and remain the night.

When we consider the thousand and one accidents, any of which might have caused a hitch and prevented this human telegraphic wire from working, it seems miraculous it came off with the success it did. The miracle-worker, however, was no other than he who had in the good old days so often before come to the rescue—"our noble Marquis," as we still call him in spite of his now more imposing title. He it was who scented out a weak spot in the vicinity of the old General, and promptly strengthened the chain by concealing young George Derode at a half-way spot, and directing him to run on to the next post, giving the signal by word if necessary.

The "Marquis," in fact, "ran" the whole show—saw each man at his post, distributed

the flags, and, swift as an arrow, shot round the course on his bicycle repeating the directions. From the moment I heard our Marquis was in Paris, I felt the victory must be to us, and my heart went up with a bound from the lowest depths to the most sanguine heights.

He and his charming little wife joined us at the Opera Comique the eve of the event. Of course she was in the secret, and begged to be allowed to have a position on the route and wave signals too. We spoke low, with one eye on Mémé, lest she should overhear us, and I felt myself blush guiltily when Mémé said suddenly, "What is it you plot there together, you two? Is it a fine marriage for Betty? Take care, lest I do not approve."

Every one we knew was in the secret. They had been told with the idea of forming a ring of watchers round Mémé, to guard her from any chance word referring either to the offensive verses of Bouilhet or to duels in general.

All our friends had evidently told all their friends, for I noticed our box was the object of an unusual amount of attention, one opera-glass after another being levelled at us. Mémé remarked it was evident the little Duchesse and I had conquered the house with our "so seductive toilettes." But I knew it was Gustave of

whom they were all trying to get a glimpse, and that the seductive toilettes and their wearers were for once very much in the way.

I did not attempt to sleep that night. Like Thérèse, I began to feel as though I must rush into Mémé's room and announce the impending tragedy at the top of my voice. It was by an effort I restrained myself. Was I not a greater traitor to be keeping silence than if I broke it? In all the real crises and difficulties of life I have invariably found conscience absolutely useless and unreliable. First it swings one side and then the other, balancing its pricks and reproaches with such exactitude, whichever way you incline to walk, that you turn from its worrying, naggling little voice in despair. How conscience ever managed to establish such a character as a reliable guide and counsellor I have never been able to understand. It has dictated quite as many of the cruel and stupid actions of humanity as their most evil passions. These were the sorry reflections with which I passed that wakeful night. At four o'clock Thérèse arrived, and, as arranged, stealthily crept in and joined me at my watch, while Gustave as stealthily crept out and jumped into the carriage awaiting him at the corner of the avenue with the doctor and his two seconds.

This doctor made up for lack of years and experience by his marvellous prevision. We heard afterwards he had dressings and remedies enough for a battle-field.

It was a grey, chilly morning as Thérèse and I saw Gustave depart, but, though he had never fought a duel before, he seemed in very good spirits. He is considered a first-rate hand with the foils, and remarked cheerily he was glad of an opportunity of turning the excellent instruction he had received to practical use. I think the professional opinion of the Irishman the preceding night had cheered him considerably.

"Sure and ye'll be able to pick the liver and the two eyes out of the Boolhy before he's so much as shtiffenend out his knees, the craythur," was the confident prediction of the son of Erin.

It is only due to the odious Bouilhet to say the Irishman had never seen him driving his automobile. He pictured him in the chronic position of prone on his back, with a chronic complexion of greenish hue.

We opened the window and waved to Gustave as the carriage drove off. Louis Lefebvre was already stationed at his corner, pacing up and down restlessly.

Presently the sight of the Marquis flying past on his bicycle heartened us both up, and we sat down by the window and resigned ourselves to waiting — waiting in silence, broken only now and then by a word as to what was the hour.

Never did time crawl by so slowly, never unless crossing the Channel in a gale.

"Half-past four!" whispered Thérèse, with a shudder as she looked at the clock; "it is at this moment they commence! The blood is perhaps already flowing."

At five o'clock the world began to stir, drowsily, faintly at first, then shook itself, blinked its eyes in the rising sun, and awoke. The stir of the busy bustling city far off came ever nearer and nearer.

Half-past five and still no signal! Louis Lefebvre had not looked in our direction for fully a quarter of an hour. His head was turned persistently towards the next signalman. What could have happened?

"But a duel, that is not an affair to prolong itself all the day," groaned Thérèse. "To kill a man surely one does not need two hours! *Ah, mon Dieu!* Look then, Louis he moves! He commences to unfurl the signal! I can no longer endure to see it!"

And, rushing from the window, Thérèse buried her face in her hands and sobbed violently.

"Weep not, *ma chérie*—it must not be that Mémé hears us," I implored, as with straining eyes and clenched hands I leaned out and watched every movement of the figure at the corner. Would he ever have finished sorting those flags!

"Thérèse," I cried; "come here quick, quick! See, he raises it at last—he waves it high! Thank God, it is the blue! it is the blue!" I shrieked, quite off my head with joy and relief.

As for Thérèse, she waited for no more, but precipitating herself down the corridor, burst open the door of Mémé's room, and flinging herself upon her sleeping mother she sobbed and laughed hysterically.

"He is saved! *Maman chérie*, it is the blue! it is the blue, I tell thee. Have no fear, he is surely saved."

Mémé is French, fortunately for her. The emotional temperament is the one she understands and shares. To be awoke out of sound slumber by a person falling on your bed with a shriek is an experience to which she can instantly adjust herself. She was wide awake and fully conscious in a moment, responding to

the emotional condition of her daughter with feeling intense enough to meet any contingency.

"But say then, *mon Dieu*, who is saved—my child? Is it then Louis? is it Gustave? And from where arrives the danger? Is it then a fire, or an assassin, or an accident of automobile, or, alas, the accursed *yacht*? Speak, then, Thérèse, my poor child!" And Mémé enfolded her in so vehement an embrace Thérèse gasped for breath as she answered:

"Calm thyself, *Maman chérie*, calm thyself. I would prepare thee against a shock to the nerves. Here is Betty, too, who comes to embrace thee; Louis, too, he also arrives that we may all support thee as we announce to thee——"

But Mémé could bear no more.

"Ha!" she shrieked, "deceive me no more! It is useless! Gustave is dead—I feel it here!"

"But altogether to the contrary," called Louis Lefebvre, entering breathlessly at that moment. "Gustave he lives. He is victor, our noble Gustave—he returns on the instant. Calm thyself, dear Mémé!" He spoke in short, vehement gasps, for he was emotioned like the rest of us.

I don't know what I said. But we all cried

and laughed and explained and expostulated till we fell back thoroughly exhausted, and then refreshed ourselves with the tea Mémé's *femme de chambre* had thoughtfully prepared. Nothing could have been more admirably discreet and sympathetic than the behaviour of Mémé's servants throughout, for of course they had been among the first to be advised of the impending duel.

Suddenly an idea struck me as I stood at the window with Louis Lefebvre, looking out for Gustave.

"You raised but one flag—the blue. How then was that? Monsieur Bouilhet, was he not wounded? If so, why did one not raise also the green and white?"

"Sch—— I pray you," he answered, glancing towards Mémé and Thérèse, who were still talking eagerly over the duel. "If I must avow the verity, there arrived some confusion owing to our good General, see you, for that one he elevated in the agitation of the moment all the flags, including also the black. Happily, me I remained calm, and awaited till the young Derode arrived. He announced to me three signals that one raised. First, the green and white; then followed quickly the blue, and then on the instant, the red and white. But me I said

to myself, we have sufficient with one—the blue—and me I decided to omit those signals which could but cause the agitation of which we have already always enough—you understand?"

"But Gustave — he is then wounded?" I spoke under my breath.

Louis Lefebvre looked at me with a half-whimsical expression as he answered: "Ah yes, very surely, Gustave, the brave boy, he will be wounded — never would he be contented otherwise, see you. It is his blood as well as that of Bouilhet which must efface the insult."

"But suppose that the wound shall be grave?" I glanced towards Mémé. "Oh, I beg you to go and meet them and care for him."

For answer Louis Lefebvre took my hand in both his and pressed it feelingly. "Courage, courage, then, my dear Mademoiselle Bétty. The solicitude tender you show for that dear boy touches me profoundly. Ah, but he is the fortunate, that one! That your heart trembles for him, the tears fill your eyes, if he knew it, willingly would our Gustave fight himself all the mornings for a month."

"I don't think you quite understand," I answered, withdrawing my hand; but at that

moment up dashed the carriage containing Gustave, the doctor, and the two *témoins*.

Louis Lefebvre was downstairs at one bound, and then followed a scene which no one who has not experienced can possibly picture, even though it were dramatised by Shakespeare.

The Irishman declared it took him right home to Ould Ireland, and was "ivery bit as good as a village wake in county Cork!"

The sight of Gustave's wrist bound round with a bandage caused Mémé a fresh *crise*, but it was quickly explained to her by a chorus of comforters that, though blood had certainly been seen, the wound was not of a nature to cause grave alarm.

Gustave protested it was only a scratch, but his mother pointed out how just those scratches there, when neglected, brought on quickly a poisoning of the blood, and she insisted on antiseptics and a sling.

"How did it happen?" I asked the Irishman aside.

"Faith and that's what the Almoighty Himself couldn't be afther telling you. I think he did it himself, for the point of the other boy's sword never so much as came within bowing distance of 'um. Ye niver saw such a comical fighter as the Boolhy! He near as possible

took the head off one of his seconds. Gustavus here could 'a wiped the floor with 'um ivery time, but he just let 'um down aysey with a sharp prick through the fat of the arrum where the muscles should 'a bin."

It appears the fact of his adversary's superiority had been patent even to Albert himself, and the fact that Gustave was deliberately sparing his life, choosing merely a spot from where he could draw enough of his traitor blood to wipe out the insult satisfactorily, had goaded Albert to the verge of frenzy.

Gladly would he have bitten the hand that so insultingly spared him. He lost his head completely, and was borne home foaming at the mouth.

Owing to the excellent management of the Marquis, several detachments of *gendarmes* arrived on the scene of action about two hours after the combatants had left the ground. They had first visited three other gardens at Neuilly, and met with most chilling receptions from the sleepy porters in charge. During the day newspaper reporters and visitors flocked to the spot, and from the number of fashionable carriages waiting at the gates it was thought a smart reception was taking place. The Marquis himself interviewed the principal reporters, and

indicated the lines on which their fluent pens were to run.

Albert Bouilhet received scant sympathy from the public. Even those who had laughed and applauded his exhibition of literary wit and humour, laughed and applauded his well-earned defeat.

Since that memorable morning the two quondam friends have never spoken, but it has become a custom for every one of the name of Bouilhet to spit ostentatiously whenever they happen to pass in the street any one of the house of D'Aville.

Mémé says I ought not to mention this, because it is not at all *comme il faut*, but when the backs of the Bouilhets are up, they do not mind one little bit about *comme il faut*, and if I am to be a faithful chronicler I must note leading characteristics.

What that stupid Louis Lefebvre said to Gustave about my "solicitude" I can only surmise by its effect on him. But that evening, after we had all dined gaily together in the Bois, I had the most trying scene with Gustave, which Mémé seemed deliberately to plan by asking Uncle Jack to drive her home and sending me alone with Gustave.

He did not wait a minute, so I could not

ward it off. He declared he knew my heart at last. Oh yes, he knew it in spite of all I might pretend. It was his—perhaps even I had not known it myself until that day? But it was his, and never would he renounce it, not for all the absent *fiancés* in the world—might they go to the devil those there! His long years of waiting were rewarded at last—my coldness and mocking were but a subterfuge to disguise my real heart and test his love to the uttermost. And I was right—oh yes! Such a heart as mine should not be easy for a man to gain!

Nothing I could say seemed to take effect that night. Oh, he knew better! At last things reached a climax, which obliged me to say I must finish the drive home in another fiacre. I had noticed the driver was taking an enormous round. Then Gustave became tragic, and when I begged him to be sensible, he turned bitter. Poor old Gustave! he had had rather a trying day, and I did not like to let him go feeling really bad, so I consented to his driving me all round by the Pont d'Alma, Étoile, and Parc Monceaux by way of a short cut home, on condition he would listen to reason, and not hold my hand as if it were caught in a trap.

When we parted I think we understood each

other at last, but I could never again play the *rôle* of *moqueuse*, for I had seen Gustave really serious twice in one day.

As to Uncle Jack, he says he will never trust me again for not telling him of the duel and giving him a post as signal-man.

V

MY COIFFEUR

JUST as inevitably as the shoemaker is a Radical, the hairdresser is a gossip. The classic barber of opera and fiction, from the famous Barbieri di Sevilla down to the hairdresser of the small provincial town of to-day, all demonstrate this fact. The trade of each produces its logical result. The shoemaker's sedentary and silent occupation leaves his brain free to do a considerable amount of thinking and reflecting, and the conclusion is obvious, as Uncle Jack would say. The barber's trade, on the other hand, obliges him to exercise the conversational gift, his interest being to keep his victim so well amused that, whereas he only comes to be shaved, he shall be lured on till he is shampooed, cut, singed, and if haply he prove one of the gilded youth, *frisé* and manicured *par-dessus le marché*.

With a client of the fair sex the coiffeur has a still wider field for his devices. Unlimited

operations may gently—almost imperceptibly—succeed each other in the hands of the expert, to which she gives a half-indolent, lethargic acquiescence, diverted by his witty and beguiling conversation and soothed by the gentle manipulations of a séance which concludes with "undulations" and face-massage. But as well might the fisherman hope for success without a bait to his hook as the barber without a silver tongue to aid his hand, however dexterous.

My *coiffeur*, Monsieur Rodolphe, is a past-master in both arts of his profession. He can give you as many personal reminiscences of distinguished contemporaries as Mr. Augustus Hare, for he holds a very *chic* position in a very *chic* quarter, and Monsieur Rodolphe is one of that secret council who decree the apparently irresponsible vagaries of the great goddess Fashion.

Mémé has known Monsieur Rodolphe for fifteen years or more, during which time he has assisted at all the great functions in the family.

It was Rodolphe who coiffed Mémé's daughter Thérèse as a budding *débutante* for her receptions and balls. It was he again who was in attendance on the eventful evening of the *soirée de contrat* and morning of her marriage.

He has lamented and remonstrated with

Mémé, whenever occasion permitted, on her most culpable neglect of her "othertime so handsome hairs," and utter lack of *coquetterie*. With sorrow he has watched those "handsome hairs" losing their lustre and their thickness. "If Madame la Baronne would but make attention—a little care—a visit once a month even! As Madame la Baronne knows well, she has but to write a little word, I come—myself I come!"

Touched by the genuine friendly interest, Madame la Baronne vows she will no longer play the ingrate. She hands over to the care of Rodolphe, then and there, her remaining hairs, her forgetful head. "But alas! How to do?" says poor Mémé. "When one has a daughter, a son, a son-in-law, and above all, a *p'tit chou*, who absorb one all the day and not infrequently the night also! And *un tas de choses* besides. Not possible to remind oneself continually of an old head on which the hairs become more and more rare, and the snows of the old age commence to fall."

Time was, however, when Mémé's sunny brown hair, with its crisp wave, which needed no assistance even from the art of Monsieur Rodolphe, had been her one little vanity—her *point de folie*—as she expresses it. It was with

pleasure, therefore, I greeted her suggestion that we should include a visit to Rodolphe in an afternoon's shopping. On our way there she confided to me that the object of this visit was a somewhat serious one, and she specially needed my advice before breaking the news of her intention to her daughter Thérèse. It was for Gustave, her unique, her well-beloved son—for his sake she contemplated taking a grave step, making, in fact, a change.

Her embarrassment not only puzzled me, but filled me with apprehension. A second marriage, of course! I felt it would make it easier for both of us if I took the bull boldly by the horns.

"You are going to marry yourself, dear Mémé? That is the step you contemplate?" I inquired with enforced composure, while my heart jumped into my throat.

Mémé's ringing laugh reassured me.

"Oh, my poor darling—my dear Betty! She believes the poor old Mémé, then, capable of all the follies! No; at that point there I have not yet arrived, the good God be thanked. And Gustave, figure to thyself then the horror of that one if I announced to him such an intention! Sooner would he conduct me to a House of Health, the poor boy!"

"But this change, then?" I murmured anxiously. The word as Mémé used it had an ominous sound.

"Ah yes, it is true—the change. Seest thou, my Betty, it is all the same grave the change, but very grave—that which I contemplate it is a transformation."

I suppose I looked some of the perplexity and anxiety I felt for my poor old friend. "A transformation! But in what then consists the transformation?" I asked. "For me, I find you are so well as you are, dear Mémé."

In my ignorance I did not at the time imagine this as merely an article of toilette.

"But, *ma chérie*, it is just that. Me, I find I am not well like this." She cast a deprecating glance down her person. "The women when they love you it makes them nothing that you coif yourself like a good *maman bourgeoise*, that you dress yourself in old costumes which date from the Empire. But the men, *ma chérie*, with those there, it is another affair. Always it pleases them to see a woman, even the old *maman*, in the toilette elegant, with the air well cared for, attractive. *Enfin*, figure to thyself that which arrived the other day to our friend Madame de Norbert. She was with her husband

the Intendant at the baths of the sea, a small hole where she imagined herself lost, and where, thinking she had no acquaintances, she made no toilette, dressed herself in old chiffons, and permitted herself to go without care. Promenading themselves one day together, they saw approaching the Colonel of the Intendant's division. 'Stay, thou; regard the objects in this bazaar,' said the Intendant, the voice moved and agitated; 'I will advance and speak with my Colonel alone.' Comprehending nothing of the situation, the good Madame de Norbert rests where he desires, and regards for ten minutes the objects in the window. When he returns she asks of her husband: 'Why, my friend, didst thou desire to speak alone with the Colonel? Did he not find it strange that I had the air of avoiding to meet him?' 'He did in effect ask me if I was not promenading myself with Madame my wife,' replied the Intendant; 'but I hastened to assure him it was only our old *bonne* whom I had just encountered, and to whom I gave some directions. Happily he finds himself so "myope," the Colonel, that my cunning succeeded and he believed me, making a thousand apologies for his mistake.' Madame de Norbert realised then for the first time how, though he said nothing, her husband observed

all. He experienced shame of her before his Colonel! Being woman of good sense she offended herself not, she took her resolution. To her husband she replied only: 'Thou didst well, my friend; I should have regretted that the Colonel should find me in this neglected costume.' But on re-entering Paris, Madame de Norbert commanded at once two new costumes of the last cry, procured herself also some *chapeaux* and *toques* elegant from Marcelle, and since her hairs were arranged in a fashion impossible to sustain those *chapeaux* there, she had constructed for her a transformation *chic*. If it arrived to me ever that my son should have shame of his mother before his chief, very certainly I should die of it. And the other day, I will confess to thee, my Betty, it appeared to me he had the air of criticising my old costume, the poor darling, for he asked me: 'Why dost thou not wear the costume grey-pearl, *maman*, which thou didst buy with Betty? It required only for thy hairs to be arranged in the mode to give thee an air altogether young and charming.' From the moment he says to me this, I resolve myself to wear always this costume grey-pearl, and to cause to be made a transformation by Rodolphe. Behold the history, *ma chère* Betty. The only doubt that I have, it

is how this coiffure will content Thérèse, and also the *p'tit chou*, the adored angel."

Feeling myself very doubtful whether Gustave, for whom this grave step was being taken, would not be the one to dislike it most, I inquired whether a transformation could be had on trial.

But Mémé thought not, and in any case had determined it should come as a joyful surprise to her son, an accomplished fact for his *jour de fête*. (*N.B.*—French people do not celebrate their birthdays as we do, thus obtruding the melancholy fact of advancing years upon a so-called day of rejoicing ; they keep instead the day of baptism, or of their patron saint.)

Monsieur Rodolphe received us with a cordial welcome and a gentle reproach to Madame la Baronne for having so long neglected him in spite of all her promises in behalf of her remaining "handsome hairs."

"I put myself in penitence, and behold as penance I desire that one makes for me a transformation of the last mode," said Mémé.

"Madame la Baronne desires at last a transformation? *À la bonne heure!*" cried Monsieur Rodolphe, in the tone of one who says "Then I die happy."

In a trice he had Madame la Baronne seated before a mirror with every variety of transformation in colour and design piled up around her, while he discoursed eloquently for the special benefit of my ignorance on that boon and blessing to woman.

In a moment of inadvertency I had referred to it as a *perruque*, and then, by way of mending matters, as a *toupet* and a *postiche*.

"The transformation she bears no more resemblance to the ancient *perruque*," explained Monsieur Rodolphe, "than does a creation of Monsieur Worth to the costume primitive of leaves worn by Adam and Eve. The transformation, *la voilà!*" (He held aloft a hairy object.) "It is an achievement of the highest art. See now, Mademoiselle, the effect which it produces upon the appearance of Madame la Baronne!"

Having carefully raked Mémé's own hair into a compact knob at the back of her head, he now proceeded to crown her reverently with one of the transformations, adjusting it carefully so that no sign of her own hair appeared.

"Is it not rightly so named?" asked the artist, regarding his work with delight.

It was, indeed! Not a vestige of the former Mémé survived. She looked at her reflection in

silent awe for a minute, then laughed hysterically till the tears ran down.

Poor Monsieur Rodolphe's face fell. He was ready to weep. I hastened to the rescue.

"It is really astonishing," I said. "A true *chef d'œuvre*. But you understand, Monsieur Rodolphe, it is not so until one has accustomed oneself—in the first shock of surprise one has to readjust the eyes a little. Perhaps, also, one might modify something on the forehead? How do you find it—a little too much furnished for Madame, yes?"

"But yes — but certainly, Mademoiselle — perfectly, but perfectly. With the transformation, see you, one can all! Even as though the hairs sprouted on the head."

So saying, with revived hope Monsieur Rodolphe began rearranging the luxuriant growth on Mémé's usually calm and clear brow.

"We will try also some of the others," he said. "See, here we have of all the varieties for that Madame can make the choice."

Each transformation revealed a new Mémé. It was most interesting. I made her try on all the collection in turn. In one she resembled Sarah Bernhardt, in another a well-known American society woman. Again, we were startled to find ourselves in the presence of

English royalty, and a moment after, behold a familiar poster of Yvette Guilbert.

"Will Mademoiselle herself not make the trial?" suggested Monsieur Rodolphe. "Nothing exists like the transformation for conserving well the hairs. If me I was in the place of Mademoiselle, with that so fine *chevelure*, I should hesitate not. The transformation spares to the hairs all fatigue, the daily wear of making the *coiffure*, and the undulation above all which ruins so quickly the hairs. All the demoiselles of the *beau monde* wear now the transformation."

"But I imagined it was only for us other poor old ones," cried Mémé. "You say it is worn by the young girls in society? Oh, but impossible, my good Monsieur Rodolphe!"

"But yes, I can assure Madame she may believe me it is the verity pure when I say that ten—twelve young demoiselles among the friends of Madame wear at this moment my transformations. But yes, the demoiselles de Raguse all the both, and Mademoiselle de Chevigné, and the pretty *débutante*, the young daughter of the Comtesse de la Baume also, but Madame will not betray me, *n'est-ce pas?* —I should be lost!"

Had Mémé been told these girls were each secretly married she could scarcely have re-

ceived a greater shock; for her their virginal bloom was hopelessly tarnished, as she remarked to me in English, not wishing to hurt the feelings of Monsieur Rodolphe.

Nothing doubting, that gentleman continued: "And for the *demoiselles Américaines*, think then, Mesdames, I have had constructed in the past fifteen days two dozen transformations at least—for one alone she commanded of them six! They are indispensable, see you, for the traversing of the ocean. Mademoiselle, she who has made the traversing to England, she will support me, is it not so? The own hairs they become, except in cases rare, of an ugliness, of a limpness insupportable—no means otherwise—by the humidity of the sea. While with the transformation behold the difference, the beauty of these travellers is not only preserved, it is enhanced, and without trouble or inconvenience of any kind. Never, Mademoiselle, must she make the imprudence of a long voyage on the sea without this precaution," he warned me. "The other day only it was that a real tragedy arrived to a young friend of one of my clients, a *demoiselle Anglaise*, young, beautiful even as Mademoiselle herself! She was *fiancée*, and should celebrate her marriage immediately on arriving at the Indias. On the road she is to

encounter the *fiancé*, and complete with him the voyage. She embarked from England with a cousin, a miss no longer in her first youth it appears, and lacking altogether the beauty of the other, so one says, but of the appearance as you say 'tailor-made,' well-conserved, and—observe the essential—coiffed always in transformation, *enfin*, at four-pins. The misfortune behold it then, when Mister the *fiancé* he joins these two young ladies at the Suez. The young *fiancée* she wears no transformation. Her hairs they rest never in place ; they become of an ugliness extreme, framing the face in torn rags, as though she represented an old sorceress. No longer can her *fiancé* support to look at her, and to console himself he turns the eyes to the picture more agreeable of her companion. That one finds herself only too content to replace her young cousin. Before the end of the voyage behold it is all finished with our poor demoiselle ! It is a history true but true that," wound up Monsieur Rodolphe impressively.

"Well," I observed, "he will be finely punished, that *fiancé* false and fickle. One cannot voyage always on the sea, and imagine to yourself what will be the emotions of that bridegroom when he beholds on the toilette-table of his bride the transformation. For no

Englishman would have realised that it was a wig she wore."

"No?" asked Monsieur Rodolphe in surprise. "The Englishman he is innocent till that point there? The Frenchman no, not, he is initiated—he knows all—that one!"

"I find that not only indiscreet but detestable," I answered. "Me, I prefer much my compatriot who believes the transformation to be real."

"Ah, but pardon, Mademoiselle, does she not perceive then that the knowledge superior of the Frenchman serves better, for never would he have betrayed his *fiancée* as did the Englishman, knowing well that she lacked but the transformation to render her charming and desirable as before. He would have pardoned the hairs, ugly and disfiguring, which for the moment disguised her beauty. All to know renders very indulgent, is it not so?" He appealed to Mémé, who was gradually assuming a more familiar air, though still sufficiently under the spell of the transformation to make her identity doubtful at a first glance.

"All to know," repeated Mémé mournfully, "who in this life dares so much! All to know may indeed render indulgent, but it renders demented sometimes also. Oh, for me, my poor

Monsieur Rodolphe, see you, I desire it not. That which you have recounted me of those young girls who wear already the transformation has tightened me the heart. I cannot chase it from my thought. I have listened but with one ear to that which you and Mademoiselle discuss."

"For fear my disorderly hairs shall lose me the heart of my *fiancé* next time I visit his ship, Monsieur Rodolphe urges me to procure a transformation," I said, and there and then took off my hat, and to Monsieur Rodolphe's immense satisfaction began trying on some of his creations.

Never till that moment had I realised what a short step suffices to cross, in outward appearance at least, the Dixie's line separating the *monde* from the *demi-monde*. There was a lovely wavy auburn-tinted transformation which gave me quite a shock, revealing, as it did to me, the mere hair on which my outward respectability is wont to hang. Mémé implored me nervously to remove the offender; even Monsieur Rodolphe was fain to admit that though this was the more *attrayante*, perhaps that of the hairs dark-brown was the more *comme il faut*. He was much disappointed, however, at my foolish determination to risk the affection of my *fiancé*

in a fine hair-net, leaving the transformations to those of a temperament less confident.

"Ah, Mademoiselle," he shook his head, "but it is not prudent."

We settled at last on a transformation for Mémé, or, more correctly speaking, for Gustave, which his devoted mother admitted went "not too badly." It certainly did rejuvenate her in a manner; but to my mind the dear, sweet, sunny face, irradiated by the heart ever young, gained nothing by this.

The only distinct advantage was that the *toque* was now able to repose on a solid foundation, and as she pointed out, this boon no one but the wearer can fully appreciate. To go through life balancing, by means of your eyebrows alone, an erection the dignity and meaning of which depend entirely on its maintaining a straight position, you require to be born and bred in the Alps Maritimes or Pyrénées, and to have practised carrying babies and oranges in that manner from your youth up.

While putting some finishing touches to his creation, Monsieur Rodolphe inquired if we had recently seen the Marquise de Fleury, and the wonderful effect of the complexion treatment she had lately undergone.

Mémé started.

"*Mon Dieu*, but surely not again has she had the courage to endure that martyrdom, that torture?" she asked.

"But yes, Madame. For the second time, and *hélas*, one knows well, this must be also the last. It is now already seven years, Madame la Baronne will remind herself, since Madame la Marquise submitted to that treatment marvellous and ingenious. It endures, however, for the seven—eight years at the most. After that time one returns, it appears, like the Cinderella when the hour sounds midnight, to the former unhappy condition."

"Never shall I forget that experience," said Mémé. "For all in the world would I not make the repetition. It was in my *appartement* Madame de Fleury refuged herself for the operation. I imagined merely that it was for an affair very slight, which might possibly affect the eyes for a few days, and my society would therefore serve to distract her while she was unable to enter as usual in the society. Happily my two children were making a visit in the country: I was thus alone. The day after her arrival the Marquise went out, warning me of nothing. Towards the four o'clock she entered, and in passing to her bedroom called to me in a voice strange and shaking. I precipitated

myself into her room. She had fallen on the sofa. She was veiled—a veil of assignation as one calls it—so that I could not well discern her features. 'I am a dying one—I suffer like a lost one. Leave me not, my friend,' she groaned. I would have sent to seek a doctor. She forbade it. 'Let no one enter this room,' she said. 'Not a single person must behold me for three days, save thee alone.' My terror, however, was such when I perceived the face that she had, that I insisted on sending at once for the operator. That one assured us that all progressed at a marvel, and, in fact, the suffering so atrocious abated at the end of twenty-four hours.

"But figure to yourselves that even in the middle of her purgatory that woman extraordinary, truly heroic, commenced to laugh, to say drolleries so irresistible the domestics believed hardly possible that Madame was *souffrante*, as I had assured them. Even her own *femme de chambre* she permitted not to approach her. 'It makes on the mind ordinary and ignorant an impression profound, which they lose never, to see the head of a beautiful person converted suddenly into that of a monster. For thee, my cat, it is no doubt strongly disagreeable, but thou who art philosopher and

saint, all the two—thou knowest well one must suffer to be beautiful above all when the beauty consists, as with me, not in that of the soul so much as the expression and tint of youth.' How could I scold her?" sighed Mémé. "Had she but endured this martyrdom for the cause of the religion or the patriotism, would she not have made to admire her all the world?"

Monsieur Rodolphe allowed this was so, but I felt far more irritation than admiration for the gay Marquise. I was certain poor Mémé had suffered mentally quite as acutely as had the Marquise physically, and without recompense save the spasmodic gratitude of her frivolous friend.

"I find it disgusting," I said, "that process for obliterating all that life has written on the face for sixty years. It produces the impression of a book with blank pages."

"*Enfin*," said Mémé, "she has but seven years, and then she must resign herself to the old age."

"But the old age is beautiful," I insisted; "and why is it," I demanded, "that artists like you, Monsieur Rodolphe, do not open the eyes of these poor ladies, such as Madame de Fleury, to see it? Why do you study always

to prolong the term of the golden, the black hairs, instead of accepting with gratitude the soft silver grey and white which suit so well with the eyes and the mouth grown old and often sad?"

"*Hélas*, Mademoiselle, you think, then, that me I would not willingly cultivate the *culte* of the old age! It is these ladies themselves who will it not. 'Conserve for us our youth,' they cry. 'We desire not the grey hairs—not yet for ten years, see you.' There was one lady among my clients, one only, who loved well her white hairs—a true '*grande dame*,' that one, of the ancient *régime*—Madame la Baronne will remember the one to whom I refer, the old Marquise de Sainte-Croix, dead now since a dozen of years. 'The old age has its nobleness,' often have I heard her say it, 'and that nobleness obliges. With the mode of the day me I have nothing more to do—it interests me not at all. The sole mode for the old age is the simplicity, the dignity, the scrupulous care.'"

"It was indeed astonishing, that atmosphere rare pervading the *entourage* of the old Marquise in that ancient palace of the Faubourg St. Germain," cried Mémé. "The old servitor with his ceremony of the grand days past, and the faithful Léonie, his wife, who, with the aged

chef, made up the *ménage* so dignified and gracious of Madame de Sainte-Croix. And Fi-fine also. Is it possible to forget Fi-fine, the magnificent old cat who sat at the side of her mistress as guard of honour?"

"But, yes, how I remind myself," cried Monsieur Rodolphe with enthusiasm. "'See there my Fi-fine,' often she would say to me, 'how she gives us the example! Every day for an hour she makes the toilette, with a care minutious and scrupulous. She is of an age very advanced, the poor Fi-fine, but never does she neglect herself even when she is suffering, the poor darling.'"

I thought of Pierre Loti's delightful cat, who went through her toilette as a sort of religious ceremony till the very day before she died, but would not interrupt these reminiscences.

"For the *coiffure* of Madame la Marquise," he went on, "it was unique, it was characteristic! In that gracious *coiffe* of the fine black lace, reposing itself upon the hairs of a whiteness, a pureness of the Alpine snows, one saw revealed that character at the same time regal and austere. She was of a pride superb. Poverty became in her such a grace that, at the side of her, riches appeared things vulgar, pretentious, undesirable. For me," and the kindly brown eyes of Monsieur

Rodolphe filled with tears as he said it, "I approached her never, that woman so truly great lady, without experiencing the emotion altogether religious of being in the church of Nôtre Dame during the *grand' messe*."

"You have reason, my good Monsieur Rodolphe. All you say there it is true," agreed Mémé. "She was saint and she was great lady all the two, and in a manner one finds rarely now. But see how many such noble daughters of France showed themselves in the great revolution! Our queen incomparable, Marie Antoinette, saint and martyr, of the heart so pitiful, so tender, yet of a courage and endurance so amazing; think also of the Princesse de Lamballe, of Madame Elisabeth, and of those three noble women with whom I rejoice to claim kinship through the great Lafayette, grandmother, mother, and daughter, who, after suffering for months every manner of torture, marched like queens heroic and calm to the scaffold. And our France, if she called them forth in the hour of some great calamity, would find again these daughters. The souls noble and great are not dead; only they sleep sometimes, alas! beneath the weight of the life of fashion, of frivolity, into which they find themselves plunged, as in a whirlpool.

"But, yes, but it is true what I say," insisted Mémé, as she read the look of scepticism on the face of Monsieur Rodolphe. "See, only as proof, with what superb calm and courage they conducted themselves, those ladies of our modern France, at the famous fire of the Bazaar de la Charité. Women one might have judged the day before as frivolous *mondaines*, face to face with a death sudden and fearful, they show their race, yes, and in spite of all, their profound sentiment religious. Mademoiselle de Villeneuve, when about to be torn from the flames by the poor man who alone appears worthy of his sex in that sad affair, replied, 'Save first my niece, I pray it of you.' When he returned to find her, though she still was conscious, the terrible flames had accomplished their work. She died next morning with a smile on the lips which might have illumined the face of Jeanne d'Arc. Again, the beautiful Madame de Hautport and her young daughter step aside as though at a reception, to permit to pass first the aged Madame Beaupré through the narrow aperture by which some managed to escape. 'After you, Mesdames,' replies this last one, with a courtesy perfect, while the shrieks of the crowd rent the air, the flames devouring and leaping on all sides. Happily, there was a moment, in

which all three were saved before the beams above fell where they stood."

"Ah, *mon Dieu*, Madame, never can I support to hear mentioned that terrible affair without lowering me the head in shame for my so unhappy sex. Those men there—the miserable ones——" Monsieur Rodolphe groaned.

"Those there, they were for the most part not men," Mémé hastened to interrupt him. "They were but spoilt children, *des flaneurs—des dandys—des poupees, etcetera.* Our men did not find themselves in that Bazaar at that hour of the day, is it not so? They occupy themselves with *les affaires.* For us other mothers, nevertheless, it was a severe warning of the danger we run to spoil our sons so that they never develop into the true men as were their ancestors."

"It is true, that which says Madame la Baronne, they were the young men decadent, puerile, effeminate; still," and Monsieur Rodolphe appealed to me, "I hope well, Mademoiselle, that the affair was never spread among the strangers? In England, for example, one heard not of it—no?"

"One judges not the courage of the French nation by one such unhappy incident," I hastened to assure him. "We in England know too well

our history of the past to permit us to doubt of the courage of the Frenchman. And now, Monsieur Rodolphe, you must show courage," I said, "the moral courage which for you men, whether French or English, is, I know it, of a difficulty extreme, and you must preach the *culte* of the beauty of the old age and the white hairs, so that we shall have again the mode of the noble Madame de Sainte-Croix. It is you and the great artists among the *couturières* and *modistes* who pull the wires directing the movements of that great machine, the fashion. We other poor ones we have no choice but to follow you!"

"Me, I desire to change that transformation," cried Mémé, hastily unpinning the elegant coiffure. "Give me one of those in the white hairs—I insist upon it. What Mademoiselle says, it is true—I know not what folly has possessed me!"

I seized her hands and used all my powers of persuasion to induce her at least to defer the white hairs till nature sent them. Her hair was but lightly sprinkled with silver; she would have the air, as Monsieur Rodolphe pointed out, of playing the comedy did she suddenly show a *chevelure* resembling that of Madame de Sainte-Croix. Our united arguments succeeded in inducing her to defer her intention for the time.

"I feel myself ridiculous," said poor Mémé, as we turned homewards. "How difficult it is —the life! To walk in the narrow path which conducts you neither to neglect the toilette, as did the poor Madame Norbert, nor to making of it a daily affair at the Cabinet de Beauté as our friend Madame de Fleury—my faith, but how to do!"

It was decided that the transformation was to be worn for the first time the following week at the family dinner, which celebrated Gustave's *jour de fête*. Uncle Jack and I as part of the family were of course invited, Madame de Bretelle also, as a cousin in some degree, and Général de Lille as one whose devotion of years and repeated offer to become as near a relation as possible entitled him to a place at the board on all occasions.

I was greeted in the entrance hall by the *p'tit chou*, who was lying in wait for our arrival.

"Knowest thou that Mémé she is coiffed in transformation? Come see her, come hasten thyself, *c'sine* Betty—me I conduct thee."

"What does she say about her Mémé?" inquired Uncle Jack. "How then, thou embracest not the Uncle Jacquot?" he called after the flying figure of his godchild.

"Wait thou me an instant, *mon* Jacquot.

I come quickly. Take thee off the mantle," shrieked the *chou* in reply, as she dragged me along towards the salon.

"*La voilà!* Is she *chic?* Is she beautiful, Mémé? After the dinner we shall make the comedy together, Mémé and me. Mémé, she shall play the most young of the seven Princesses, while me, I shall be the frog so ugly who becomes on the night of marriage the handsome Prince. Then we shall change, and me, I shall wear the pretty transformation—*n'est-ce pas?* Mémé thou hast promised it, and I will be the little girl of the golden hairs, and Mémé, she without transformation, shall represent the old Sorceress in the forest, but yes—yes—yes!"

The *chou* clapped her hands in an ecstasy of delighted anticipation as she clambered on to her Mémé's knee, and stroked the delightful new acquisition Mémé had provided for her diversion. Then, like a streak of lightning, she was off to play showman in the next introduction to the transformation.

Meanwhile Mémé turned from one to another of her assembling guests. Général de Lille, Madame de Bretelle, Thérèse and her husband, all gave their opinion on the important subject, and at the highest pitch of their voices. Approval was general, though mixed with little

subtle touches of criticism. One declared that while it undoubtedly gave an air *bien mise* and *à la mode*, it changed perhaps a little too much the familiar aspect. Another said it was altogether admirable, it give Thérèse a sister in place of a mother.

Gustave, seated on the arm of his mother's chair, listened to all without taking any part, and regarded his mother with a look of mingled solicitude and perplexity.

Uncle Jack's entrance having been heralded by another shrieking introduction from the *chou* and a fresh burst of laughter, we all went in to dinner, where the discussion was renewed.

"And Gustave, *le malin*, he says nothing!" cried my uncle. "See now, what is thy opinion, *mon ami?* Sch——, let us listen well." He placed his hand over the mouth of his small neighbour, the still chattering *chou*.

"My friends!" Gustave embraced all with his glance. "I find myself in a position very embarrassing, you understand. My mother adored, well-beloved, I found her already the perfection itself. How then can I say I find her now still better? Yet it is not to be denied the transformation—that there is truly the word, is it not so, my cousin?" He appealed to me. "The so-saying transformation is of an art

admirable, superb." He bowed to me as if my hand was responsible for it, and I hastily disclaimed.

"But it was not I who created the work of art. I am in no way the culpable. On the contrary, I too am of your advice that, however great the success of this coiffure, I also found our Mémé needed no transforming."

"Thousand pardons, *ma cousine*, I imagined to myself that you perhaps had drawn on our Mémé towards this step. I throw myself at your feet! Ah, regard me not with the eye so indignant, or for me this will be no day of feast but one of the despair. What I ask myself then is this," he appealed to the company, "Why, for what reason possible, this transformation is she introduced in the family?"

This question was a challenge for every one to commence sharpening their wit upon poor Mémé, while she, clasping the hand of her son across the table, reiterated amidst the din:

"But it was for thee, my son, for thee, thee alone, my child!"

"Ah," cried Thérèse, who perhaps felt this rather a slight upon herself. "For me I think it was to please the Général de Lille. Here for seven years he makes the court to *maman*."

"For seven years!" exclaimed the Général.

"Since fifteen years it is! From the same moment when first I saw her. And for the rest, as our dear Baronne knows well, I offered myself to her without condition of any sort that should include a transformation."

"*Enfin*," continued Thérèse. "He receives at last his reward, our noble and gallant Général. His lady makes herself beautiful for him."

"And me, I hoped that perhaps she had me in the eye," sighed Uncle Jack. "My devotion it dates from the first youth, is it not so, dear Mémé?"

"And me," rose the shrill pipe of the *p'tit chou*, "I know well why Mémé wears the transformation. She will make herself beautiful, like the lady who inhabits the handsome *hôtel en face;* the hairs are even as are those of Mémé now, perhaps a quite little more gilded—*Voilà tout.* That one about whom one has forbidden me to speak, thou knowest, *ma c'sine?*" I made no response, save to look as if I had never heard of that lady before. But the *chou* insisted. "Even I may not smile when she smiles to me—hard, that! The Uncle Gustave, he knows well the one I would say, for she did smile to him and blew to him a kiss when we passed her in the carriage, him and me!"

"Oh, *tais-toi donc!*" cried Thérèse. "Thou

chatterest too much." Then to her mother, who in spite of her laughter was blushing like a school-girl, "That child becomes impossible, seest thou? She is a menace to all repose—all peace. It is a real *enfant terrible.*"

"Ah, the poor darling. Scold her not!" said Mémé. "But it is well finished with the unhappy transformation—I wear it no more, my children. Rather will I make myself to be coiffed with the own hairs all the days by Rodolphe."

VI

LA CIGALE

MÉMÉ has a vast army of pensioners and parasites. The former do not necessarily belong to the latter class ; but, even when proved to be of a growth injurious and exhausting, the parasite never fails to become a pensioner, generally a life-pensioner. Among the latter the Comtesse de Montargot would be hard to beat for leech-like qualities which time only serves to strengthen.

Her acquaintance with Mémé began twenty-five years ago at Homburg. Madame de Montargot's good genius, or Mémé's evil one, guided their feet to the same hotel, and Mémé, with her small son Gustave, then about six years old, was soon marked and stalked by the lively widow of bright black eyes and vivacious manner.

Gustave, as I never fail to remind him when he reproaches his mother for the trial this lady is to the family, Gustave it was who served as

the stepping-stone to this lifelong friendship, or rather connection, between the two. Though so superior, according to his mother, in everything else, Gustave, like other small boys, was open to the blandishments of any one approaching him with *bon-bons*. Mémé could do no less than join her thanks to his, and with the gift of a smart box of chocolate caramels Madame de Montargot riveted the first link in the chain that was to bind poor Mémé for life.

A week later the Comtesse, who had meanwhile, with frank spontaneity, confided her life's story to her sympathetic new friend, came to her overwhelmed with distress. Her dear Madame d'Aville was the only one to whom she could turn in the calamity which had overtaken her. She had a confession to make. She had been tempted to augment the modest rents left her by her adored husband, and risk a few francs at roulette. Alas! quite the contrary of augmenting, the rents had diminished. She had lost persistently. In the hope of redeeming this loss she had taken out capital —much capital. But still the bad luck of the devil himself had pursued her. And now the hotel proprietor, a man lacking altogether the tact, courtesy, and refinement of character necessary for his position, had demanded

brutally for his money, with threats of introducing into her rooms a large German Jew just arrived, and throwing Madame la Comtesse out of the door if she had not paid by to-morrow at mid-day. What to do! She was in the middle of her cure; to leave at this moment would be to waste completely the good money already expended. Madame de Montargot wrung her hands and lifted tearful eyes to the gorgeous ceiling of her room. Of course, the large German Jew must enter here, and she must retire herself to a little hole in the roof; but hardship and privation she could bear—they were the lot of the poor widow—and if only her dear noble friend could lend her a few hundred francs to pull her out of this ugly affair, she would earn the gratitude of said poor widow to all eternity.

Of course Mémé came to the rescue, though neither in those days nor these days has she had any hundred francs she could give without missing it. She paid the clamouring hotel-keeper, paid the remaining weeks of the cure, and when the doctor declared all the benefit of Homburg would be lost unless followed by a three weeks' after-cure in the mountains, Mémé, hearing that an old aunt had reluctantly promised to pay one half, if her improvident

niece could raise the other, came forward and supplied that deficiency also.

It was a loan, they both said, but I do not think, even at that early stage, there was any doubt in the mind of either as to the loan being of that class awaiting repayment in the land where neither roulette nor *rouge et noir* do corrupt nor unpaid hotel-keeepers break out and swear.

They parted with many assurances from Madame de Montargot that her *chère amie* would before long see her in Paris. A large party of hotel friends assembled to see Mémé off, and wish her *bon voyage*, and among several offerings of flowers Madame de Montargot's was triumphantly conspicuous, being the duplicate of one presented by the mayoress to a German princess, while a box of *bon-bons* tied up with pink satin ribbons made an effectual bid for Gustave's ever-vacillating affections.

"What a good heart," sighed poor Mémé, sadly contemplating the results of forty or fifty dissipated francs. That they were her own francs Mémé would have thought herself despicably mean for remembering.

The promise that Mémé should see her again shortly was faithfully kept by Madame de Montargot, and Mémé soon learnt that it was the

only promise that her new friend could be absolutely relied on to keep. Yet she never reproached her, excusing all, as the Comtesse herself excused it, with an indulgent smile for her disposition, *sans-souci* and *sans-gêne*—"a temperament of the grasshopper, *voilà tout!*" she would say. "I sing all the summer, and in the winter some good ant he helps me always, for happily all the ants they do not resemble that one of the fable."

Madame de Montargot possessed many of the attributes of Charity. She believed all things (of a flattering nature), hoped all things (of a pleasant description), and she encouraged the grace of charity in others by borrowing all things, from a pair of boots to a thousand francs, while she went on her way with a gay laugh. Her appetite never failed, nor did her sleep, and her trust in a Providence specially instituted for the guidance of feet in borrowed shoes never wavered. The power she possessed of falling on those same feet really seemed to justify her faith.

During those first years of their acquaintance, many and varied were the careers and adventures of Madame de Montargot. She was always on the brink of the abyss or riding on the crest of the wave—never anything so mono-

tonous as smooth waters. For a long time matrimony continued to be the harbour towards which she believed herself steering. Fifty was the ideal age for *les secondes noces*, and Mémé was told of a mysterious Russian prince, who would shortly come into his own, but was meanwhile obliged to borrow all he could obtain of the slender fortune of his princess-elect. Any remarks expressing doubt as to the exalted character and position of this nobleman were received with warm indignation by Madame de Montargot, till one fine day, when she announced suddenly that she never wished to pronounce his name again ; he was for her as one dead. It is to be feared that quite half the poor lady's fortune was also "as dead." After this came a long spell of fortune-tellers, palmists, and astrologers, and Mémé, finding expostulation useless, herself took up the study of palmistry and "laying cards" in order to save some of the five- and ten-franc pieces that were filling the pockets of these "professors."

"I shall tell you quite as truly," Mémé assured her, "and you will be five francs the more rich." This argument proved so successful that Mémé soon established quite a wide reputation as a sorceress. She has ever since

used her black art as a means for wedging in bits of advice and reproof she would not otherwise know how to administer, and not even Uncle Jack dares call palmistry humbug or waste of time, as practised by Mémé.

After the prince, other *prétendants* flitted across the *Cigale's* path, none however leading to a matrimonial alliance, though one, an artist of unappreciated genius, induced her to embark in what he was pleased to call a commercial partnership. This gentleman had discovered a secret for making mustard which was not mustard, though possessing its essential attributes—so he declared. He had come upon the discovery in a remarkable manner while painting an impressionist picture of a London fog. The picture and colouring were the more remarkable as Monsieur Nada-Bolbec had never crossed the Channel. The mixture was to be advertised as Mustardine, or rather *La Moutardine*, and was to be sold at one-half the price of real mustard, while costing only one-tenth to make. Thus all would be benefited, and one might truly call the producers of *moutardine* philanthropists in the broadest sense. Monsieur Nada-Bolbec contributed the secret, Madame de Montargot the funds necessary for making the affair to march—namely, the machinery for

pounding and crushing, the *batterie de cuisine* for cooking, the tins and papers for packing, &c. She was assured by Monsieur Nada-Bolbec that a little nothing of three thousand francs would cover this outlay, and presently each of the partners must be gaining at the lowest computation seventy francs a day.

Then it was discovered that a man to pack the mustardine, and a woman to assist Madame de Montargot in preparing it, were absolutely necessary. By great good fortune a brother of Monsieur Nada-Bolbec was willing to undertake this work, together with his wife and two handy little boys. They had also a room to let for the purpose at a merely nominal rent. "One must live," as Monsieur Nada-Bolbec continually reminded his partner, and in consequence of this necessity on the part of the Bolbec family Mme. de Montargot soon found herself another two thousand francs the poorer.

Mémé warned and implored, but not even the eight, nine, and ten of spades, appearing in dismal conjunction under the head of her "dearest wish," availed to deter the Comtesse from this enterprise. Having given already so much, it would be the folly pure to stop short, and lose all for the sake of another thousand francs, she argued. Besides, she was persuaded

that a great talent for *les affaires* had lain dormant in her all these past years; it was wide awake now, and she was going to use it. Mémé's steadfast refusal to invest in the concern pained her friend greatly, but she assured her a portion of the colossal fortune in prospect should one day be hers, whether she invested money or no. "Such a good heart," sighed Mémé; "but alas! I fear too trusting." A remark I have often heard Uncle Jack apply to Mémé herself.

It was not for nothing the spades had showed themselves in the projected enterprise of Madame de Montargot. A day came at last when the urgent demand of the Bolbecs "to live" had to be supplied elsewhere. "I can no more!" groaned the paying partner.

In spite of machinery, saucepans, and ingredients sufficient to supply mustard to the whole of France for two years, the brother and sister-in-law of Monsieur Nada-Bolbec continued to declare they must have more. "They say the *moutardine* is so powerful it wears the saucepans quickly into holes," explained Madame de Montargot to Mémé. "It is true," she added, "for me, I have seen them, the holes! It would appear this fact but proves the excellent quality of the condiment."

Mémé, reflecting on this observation, came to the conclusion that the total bankruptcy in which the Mustardine Company shortly ended was perhaps after all a merciful dispensation of Providence. For had the mustardine of Monsieur Nada-Bolbec once been afforded free play for wearing holes in the insides, not only of saucepans, but of humans, the unfortunate Comtesse might have found herself lying in a prison cell for the untimely end of a large portion of the French population. As it was, Mémé, at the end of six months, with difficulty extricated her business friend from the clutches of the law, while the family of Nada-Bolbec vanished altogether from the scene, in spite of being diligently sought by many gentlemen most thoroughly in earnest.

After this episode came that of her engagement as *dame de compagnie* to three American girls. Mémé supplied most of the outfit. They were to begin with two months in Algiers, and then go on to Rome and Florence. At the last moment it was found that Madame de Montargot had no boots, only a pair of Pompadour *glacé* kid shoes, and some pearl-grey satin slippers. Mémé, whose numerous pensioners had left her very few spare louis, gave two of these precious coins with which to buy

some serviceable boots at the Bon Marché. The new *dame de compagnie* wrote from Algiers that never had two louis done better service, though not precisely in the direction intended. With thirty francs she had bought a pair of exquisite embroidered silk stockings, a real "occasion," for they were marked forty-five, while the remaining ten francs had gone in Pivonia perfume, which had greatly softened the rigours of the journey. She had travelled in the satin slippers, an old pair which had served well. Behold what economies one was obliged to practise. The stockings were very *chic*, and had attracted already much admiration.

For a while all was *couleur de rose*. The Americans were altogether charming, and rich —but rich! They adored their *chère* Comtesse, and lavished gifts upon her. Money flowed like water, and Madame de Montargot swam in the element with heedless enjoyment of the present, unclouded by a thought for the future. Mémé's words of advice to put by for the inevitable rainy day fell on deaf ears. It was summer-time, the *Cigale* must dance and sing. There came hints also of a brilliant alliance, a wealthy uncle of the three girls who was making the court in a manner discreet but

unmistakable. Mémé anxiously awaited further news. An ominous silence of nearly six weeks followed. Then, on returning from an afternoon drive one day, whom should Mémé find installed comfortably in the salon but her friend the *Cigale*, her hat and mantle laid aside, an unmistakable air about her of having come to stay—and she had.

There had been a *fracas*—the rich uncle the cause. Jealousy, my dear friend, jealousy! Alas! how despicable is human nature when self-interest is aroused. Those girls had shown themselves as veritable *canaille*. No vendors of herrings at the market could have manifested a spirit of greater cupidity, or tongues of such a malice. In Rome the eldest girl had become engaged to an Italian marquis, a pierced basket, an eater ; but because of the title, a new title, which his father had bought for a few hundred francs, he had been accepted with enthusiasm. Yet behold the inconsistency, the views of life, sordid and *mesquin*, of these "new rich." When she, Madame de Montargot, who was of the purest and most ancient blood, and of a personal character irreproachable, permitted them to see she contemplated a union with their uncle, they shrieked her in the ears that it was an idea monstrous and absurd. They jumped

her on the back; they only just failed to tear her out the eyes. The uncle they forced to depart next day to Vienna, pretending some urgent affairs. She had, however, obtained his address, and followed him. He received her with courtesy, but it was evident the poor unhappy one was the victim of an absolute tyranny, and dare not follow the counsels of his heart. He had avowed as much, and was so nervous at parting that he had, Madame de Montargot was convinced, made an error in the cheque he had given her to defray her expenses. She opened it expecting at least 5000 francs, and behold the miserable sum of five hundred.

She was now without the sou, and refuged herself in the arms of her unique friend on earth, sure of a welcome till she could find a little hole in which to burrow.

On that occasion the *Cigale* remained two months, and she might have been there till this day, had she not developed a hitherto suppressed quality, the one failing with which Mémé has no sympathy, namely, an excessive, exacting jealousy of all other *protégés*, pensioners, and parasites.

Things reached such a point at last that Mémé begged a friend at Fontainebleau to insist on coming to visit her, and with this

excuse removed the *Cigale* to a room she hired for her. Madame de Montargot continued to appear for at least one meal a day, but the strain was less severe.

There was one young man, however, the Vicomte de Boissy, who specially excited her ire. He was an artist, with the pleasant, irresponsible temperament belonging to so many of his tribe. Mémé took him under her capacious wing, and made it her business to get him orders. Monsieur Hector de Boissy resented the large presence of the *Cigale* under the wing where he found so good a shelter, but his complacency prevented his regarding his rival as a real danger ; whereas the *Cigale's* hatred was mixed with the deadly fear of being supplanted. They kept a smile of peculiar bitterness for each other, but whenever the mother bird was not looking pecked viciously.

I came in for one passage of arms. Madame de Montargot had called as usual, about half-past eleven, with of course every intention of remaining for *déjeuner*. Her disgust was but thinly disguised on finding Monsieur Hector already in possession, doing the honours till Mémé entered, quite child of the house. She removed her mantle and hat, and tried to convey the idea to this dense young man that

his presence was superfluous. But de Boissy showed no signs of removing himself.

"You make the visits very matinal, Monsieur," she began.

"It is true, Madame," he answered, smiling, "we are matinal you and me all the two. But I make my visit of digestion, having dined here with our good friends last night."

Mémé's entrance interrupted this pleasant *tête-à-tête*, but she soon realised that if looks could kill, the young man writing in the corner of the room would be lying dead on the floor.

As the hour for *déjeuner* drew near, Madame de Montargot became restless and irritable. Finally, she rose and put on her cloak.

"But you remain and breakfast with us?" cried Mémé, in surprise.

"Thanks—a thousand times—but to-day it appears you are already occupied with friends. I will not detain you longer."

"It is Monsieur de Boissy that you refer to? Oh, but he counts not, that one. He is here as child of the house, see you."

Monsieur Hector looked up from his writing, and winked mischievously at Mémé just as Thérèse and I entered. Madame de Montargot did not trouble to return our greeting. "In verity so it appears," she retorted, pale with

anger. "Well, since you have new favourites here, me I prefer to retire myself. *Je m'en vais!*" Seizing her hat, she rammed it down on her head, adding again with still greater determination, "*Je m'en vais!*"

Mémé made no reply, and the head of the favourite bent low over his writing.

With appalling dignity Madame de Montargot walked to the door. The sound of preparations for the *déjeuner* could be heard through the folding-doors of the next room.

"*Je m'en vais!*" she repeated again, but the voice seemed to have lost some of its inflexibility and taken on more the ring of huffiness.

Just then the servant entered. "Madame la Baronne *est servie*," she announced.

The presence of a savoury omelette could be distinctly discerned. Its delicate aroma proved too much for the hungry *Cigale*.

"But no—I remain!" she broke out defiantly. "Why should I quit a good breakfast? No, decidedly me I remain — I go not to make pleasure to any one!"

Still dead silence on the part of her audience, as she took off her cloak and bonnet again, smoothed down her crisp iron-grey hair, and continued to murmur even as we all passed into the dining-room.

"No—decidedly I remain—I remain——"

We all sat down, and a fragmentary conversation began as we attacked the famous omelette which had so wrought on the feelings of the *Cigale*. It was succeeded by a *faux filet*, which completed her conversion.

Suddenly she reached out a hand to Mémé, who had as yet kept silence. "My good friend —pardon me? Me, I am like that, see you. I have altogether the temperament choleric of my poor father the General. If anything contraried him, he made always tiger's blood. Ping-pong he threw all by the window—the best porcelain, the best friend; me, I resemble my father."

Tears were in the eyes of the poor old *Cigale*, and in others too, at this public *amende* and Cassius-like excuse. Mémé would not have been Mémé had she not returned the hand-clasp with fervour.

"But it is admirable, after all, that temperament there," she laughed, with a little break in her voice. "Take a little more *filet*, dear friend."

I think even her hated rival was touched, for he assisted her to put on her cloak when she left, and they parted with apparent cordiality. How long it would have lasted no one dare say. Fortunately, they were put to no test, for shortly

after this Mme. de Montargot received a small legacy from an aged aunt, which filled her with a thirst for new fields of action. One day she came in bubbling with excitement. It appeared she had been to the fair at Neuilly the previous evening, had passed a ravishing *soirée*, and met with an adventure marvellous and thrilling. In the tent of the Wheel of Life and Death she had found herself placed next to a man of distinguished appearance. They had entered into conversation, feeling by a subtle magnetism an irresistible attraction the one for the other. Life, death, destiny, mystery, force—these words on the lips of Monsieur Binard acquired new meaning, illuminated by his genius, rare and penetrating.

Before they parted he introduced his wife, a charming woman, dressed with exquisite and original taste in toilettes designed and executed by herself. Together they had visited the three-legged lady, bizarre and intriguing, had witnessed the mysteries of Khama, and ridden the Racing Pigs. Monsieur Binard, with all his genius, had the gay good heart of a child. He entrained you with him, his youth was contagious. The man on the pig behind him stole his purse, but he made no trouble of the loss, and Madame de Montargot was proud to be

of use in defraying all expenses. Both he and his wife were people of *esprit*, vivacity, and enthusiasm. This enthusiasm, they confided to their new friend, centred itself for the moment entirely in *le jeu*, Monsieur Binard having discovered a marvellous system for controlling the caprices and vagaries of Chance. They were leaving for Belgium in two days, and the *Cigale*, before they parted at the fair, had there and then thrown in her lot with theirs.

Toin was the destination of the travellers, that charming little retreat where those of modest means can lay their one franc on the table and, thanks to the scientific method of Monsieur Binard, come away millionaires. In vain did Mémé bring the past to remembrance. This experience was unique, declared Madame de Montargot, and had no parallel in history.

The Binard system was a secret, the great secret of the age, in fact. He was elaborating a scheme by which this secret would be shared by a chosen company, who would ultimately rule the destinies of the entire world. For the method by which one gained could not fail. Again and again Monsieur Binard had demonstrated the fact on paper, and men of the greatest learning and renown had borne witness to the results, though totally unable to explain them.

This limited company would be most carefully selected. Each member must of course contribute a certain sum, but money was by no means the sole qualification. A large spirit, a noble ambition, a belief in the solidarity of the race, and specially of the company, and a boundless love of humanity, coupled with the determination to control and direct the destiny of mankind for its good—these were a few of the items in the prospectus of Monsieur Binard.

Mémé paid the journey back from Toin, the legacy having vanished like morning mist before the sunny smiles and assurances of Monsieur Binard. "Courage—courage, *chère* Comtesse, yet once again, and all is ours!" So franc followed franc as the little roulette ball twirled round and round in its giddy dance.

With a wisdom born of experience, Mémé stipulated that the ticket to Paris should be bought and the journey made the day on which the money was received.

"The good Monsieur Binard, he was much pained," said the *Cigale*. "To touch so nearly the goal, yet to fail in attaining it—perhaps for lack of a little piece of ten francs! Such are the true tragedies of life."

It was but a small sum at the right moment that the system of Monsieur Binard required.

But though with that journey money all might have been set on their feet again, Madame de Montargot had not dared to misappropriate the money sent, her intention being to plant herself again on her patient friend till she could decide on her future.

This future began to be a difficult, if not an insoluble, problem. An inexorable cousin was the sole remaining relation who could be appealed to. She replied sternly that the only assistance she would give was a small yearly pension, on condition that Madame de Montargot entered an Institute for poor gentlewomen, for which her husband could obtain a nomination.

The alternative, and one the poor *Cigale* would infinitely have preferred, was to instal herself in the newspaper kiosk of Madame Thomé in the Place du Louvre. "There at least one sees life and movement. One enjoys a little conversation with men intelligent and agreeable, at the same time one is protected from the cold or the sun. But the unhappy Institute, *mon Dieu!* A cage where one clips you the wings, and measures out to you a few grains of nourishment daily, where you are surrounded with widows and old girls of feeble intelligence, and little tongues full of malice.

For me, rather would I retire myself to the tomb of my family at Montmartre."

The stress of circumstance, however, became too strong for her to resist. She was literally now without the sou, owing in fact many sous. Her debts were to be paid, and a small allowance made, only on condition she entered the Institute. Mémé counselled the step, seeing no alternative save that of adopting the *Cigale* permanently, which would have caused a mutiny in her home.

"Thou alone of all my friends dost counsel my enduring this incarceration," she reproached Mémé. "Thy lack of sympathy tears me the heart." But the step was taken.

This Institution was planned on very different lines from the *asile* of old Madame de Montchesnay. The latter represented liberty and luxury as compared with the home of the poor *Cigale*, hedged in by petty rules and restrictions, against which she has never ceased beating rebellious wings.

The founder of the Maison Dupuy left everything under the direction of the Sisters, and to these good but somewhat narrow women economy appeared as the most excellent rule of life for the old ladies, who they argued had probably in the past spent a good deal too much.

Besides, not only was a mortifying of the flesh the best preparation for leaving it, but any money saved on the old ladies, and returned to the present Dupuy, was invariably sent back promptly by that gentleman as a present to the convent of these excellent Sisters. Every one, therefore, benefited, and the admirable management of the Sisters was lauded by all except the old ladies. The founder had desired that each inmate should have a room to herself; but the Sisters decreed that dormitories divided by a curtain would be more convenient for supervision and more economical to construct. By day also the Sisters decreed that all should dwell in the perpetual society of each other, none being allowed to retire to her own little division till bedtime. Even for the garden there were fixed and limited hours. Only once a week were the *pensionnaires* permitted to visit their friends, unless by special, and not easily obtainable, permission from the Mother Superior. Only twice a week were friends received, and then, at stated and limited hours, in the public salon, where two or three Sisters never failed to preside.

In case of illness there was the infirmary, a dreary building, urging speedy convalescence, and to tend you, again the Sisters! "Always the Sisters," bemoaned poor Madame de Mon-

targot, describing her life. "You find them everywhere, in the garden, in the salon, in the kitchen, in your bedroom, in the air you breathe, mixed with your food. When I come to die I know I shall find one already installed in my coffin—never is one free from them, the inevitable Sisters."

At the sound of a sharp, insistent bell at half-past six, each old lady was obliged to turn out of her narrow bed, and retire at nine with the same clockwork regularity. "It will certainly kill me, this *régime*, cold and hard of a prison," groaned the *Cigale*. But as a matter of fact she never looked better, and the Sisters, when murmurs reached them, always justified their galling rules and regulations by pointing to the remarkable longevity of the pensioners.

"It revolts me," declared Madame de Montargot; "those women who continue to exist like embalmed mummies—of what are they fabricated, those there? We have five of them over ninety, and one has positively not been ashamed to attain her hundred and three. Ah, but the harm she has done to the Institution for we poor others, that one there! That which she can endure, the Sisters declare, can we others also, forgetting that with us the blood still flows in the veins, the heart beats, and the

brain thinks, while with the old one all has ceased."

Madame de Montargot's one consolation has been her friendship for Madame Carron, a lady of ripe age, but admirably well preserved physically and mentally. She had been already seven years in the Maison Dupuy at the time of Madame de Montargot's arrival.

Madame Carron is a woman who, whether in a palace, prison, or convent, has always made for herself a following, held a court, and enlisted an audience. "*Une femme hors ligne*," as her friend truly says of her, adding with fervent admiration, "In accepting favours she has always the air of conferring them." Madame Carron was an excellent *raconteur*. Her personal reminiscences she often prefaced with, "What I tell you here, it is a page of the history of France, one of those unwritten pages worth many of the chapters printed." She has been the friend and adviser of kings, sultans, and presidents. Prime ministers have come to her for counsel in moments of acute emergency, and invariably regretted it when failing to follow her advice. Had Thiers but listened to her she could have saved France: "but he refused to be advised, he obstinated himself, that one, and see now the consequences."

But the thrilling part about Madame Carron is the fabulous fortune to which she is heir. Buried safe in the grounds of a certain convent lies a treasure, gold, precious stones, and objects of art, compared with which the riches of Monte Cristo pales as a rushlight in presence of the sun. It was deposited in this hiding-place by the maternal great-granduncle of Madame Carron during the time of the Revolution. For several generations all was believed to have been lost, but papers revealing the real facts, together with plans of the convent grounds, and a detailed list of all the treasure, were discovered in the secret drawer of an ancient bureau some fifteen years ago. So far, however, in spite of every effort, no one has succeeded in finding the treasure. There are nine remaining descendants of the house of the Marquis de Catalan, but such wealth, both in gold and jewels, is sufficient to make of each one a millionaire.

The difficulty is that for the moment, only for the moment, of course, money must be expended in defraying the continual expense of the excavations. Among the nine heirs money is difficult to collect, yet each must pay their part or be content to relinquish their share. Two men of exceptionally trustworthy character have

been employed to dig and search. Year in and year out these worthies may be found spade or rake in hand, and if they lack energy and vigour, at least no one can reproach them with having either pocketed or bolted with the treasure. Now and then they dig deep enough to come upon water; this entails a fresh outlay in machinery and implements for pumping out. Any money lent for meeting these expenses is to be repaid a thousand-fold as soon as the treasure reveals itself. Ah! when that day dawns what will she not do? The schemes for the benefit of the human race which Madame Carron has drawn out are as innumerable as they are admirable.

"Impossible to listen to her without being impressed by her large ideas and her eloquent enthusiasm," at least this was Mémé's experience, and Madame Carron was soon enrolled among the pensioners. "A woman of such philanthropy, such noble ideas — sad fate in verity if she should find all her schemes frustrated because no one would assist in drawing her out of a moment of difficulty. It is but a small loan I give her now and then, but she experiences a gratitude the most touching. She rewards me with a necklace of rubies and two hundred thousand francs!"

"Alas, Mémé," I said sadly, "I perceive at last your true character. No Shylock could be more calculating and mercenary. With such interest, no wonder you lent to her again yesterday—oh yes," I continued remorselessly, "I know you did that, for she herself told me so, and spoke of you as a heart of gold, an angel of pity—the poor deluded lady."

"But I lent her a little nothing—absolutely it was nothing," protested Mémé.

"Well," I said, "I think Uncle Jack will be very pleased to hear what a good woman of affairs you have become, and what splendid investments you are making."

Uncle Jack is Mémé's trustee and business adviser, when his advice is asked, which is not often. He never ceases protesting against the birds of prey, as he calls most of Mémé's pensioners, and Mémé in consequence tries to prevent his knowing of them. Madame de Montargot is his special aversion, chiefly on account of the very embarrassing affection for himself which he called forth by once sending her a New Year's gift. She accepted it as the equivalent of a "declaration," and though Mémé carefully explained it was not intended in this sense, the *Cigale* protested that her intuition was never at fault in these delicate affairs; all

he needed, the dear good man, was encouragement, and that no one should deter her from showing him whenever occasion offered.

To Madame Carron, also, Uncle Jack is an object of fervent admiration in spite of his distant and retiring manners whenever they meet. She pays him her homage openly and unreservedly, complimenting him not only on his mental endowments, which recall to her memory those of Victor Hugo, Lamartine, and the elder Dumas, but also his fine head of Jupiter, and his magnificent shoulders of Apollo, making him feel, as he once told her, "altogether chilly, even as an antique sculpture in the Louvre."

Madame Carron has brought into the life of the poor *Cigale* just the element essential for keeping her going. The treasure supplies them both with a foundation on which to build a future many-hued and high-towering as a rainbow. Besides the philanthropic schemes, such as model villages and towns, luxurious homes for children, for the aged, for the blind, lame, and halt, for dogs and for cats, there are personal plans which have to be arranged to the minutest detail. The two old ladies spend many an evening planning a journey to Algiers, or a tour in the East, and discussing, to the verge of a quarrel, whether two maids and

a courier, or two couriers and a maid, or two maids and two couriers would be most advisable. They are to live together, that is quite decided, and Madame Carron has drawn out a legal paper endowing Madame de Montargot with an ample fortune, over which she is to have absolute control. This enables her to indulge in the luxury of making wills and bequests in her turn, a favourite occupation with both *pensionnaires* on a rainy day.

One great thing about the treasure is the constant state of tiptoe expectancy in which it keeps its owners. Any day the announcement may come that it has been found. The consequence of this is that though Madame Carron and Madame de Montargot have both been at the Maison Dupuy for many years now, they have never felt more than birds of passage, lightly poised as it were on a wayside branch, their wings fluttering ready for flight.

"We are here but for the moment," they say. "It is probable that we quit in some weeks' time; but precisely the day, impossible to say."

This conviction enables them to bear with cheerful resignation the annoyances and restrictions which would be otherwise intolerable to people of their liberty-loving temperaments.

Meanwhile, Mémé is the "softener" of their

lives, constantly supplying little sums to pump out the water, and buy shoes for the winter, to replenish the tea-caddy, or purchase fresh materials for the Empire chair. The history of that Empire chair has been rather curious; never did a chair so resemble a cormorant.

One day Madame de Montargot, paying her weekly visit, announced the intention of making Mémé a little present in token of her affection and gratitude. It was to take the form of an Empire chair, for which she would do a piece of needlework after a design of that period seen in a friend's house. The chair itself was a genuine antique, at that moment in the possession of a dealer in furniture at Montmartre. It would fit admirably Mémé's little boudoir, furnished only with pieces of the Empire period, and the dealer had consented to put it aside for the present. Mémé expressed her delight at the prospect of this charming gift, but begged that the needlework only might be presented to her, as she would find among her own chairs one to suit it. At parting, she pressed ten francs into the hand of her friend for the purchase of silks and wools. "For I know well," she said, "that one must pay much for those machines there."

Madame de Montargot acknowledged reluc-

tantly that for the moment, until the treasure was found, she had not, unhappily, the means of purchasing all the materials necessary. The week following, she confided to Mémé that just a few francs more would, she feared, be necessary for the canvas and needles. A fortnight later, on Mémé's inquiring how the Empire chair progressed, she was told that, alas! the work was practically at a standstill for lack of a frame whereon to fix it. Of course, a frame would be a heavy outlay to buy, but for a small sum one could hire it by the month, and this was the course Madame de Montargot would strongly counsel.

As this monthly payment continued from this date on for three solid years, at the lowest computation Mémé should at the end of that time have been the possessor of at least seventeen embroidery frames of the first quality and size. As to the wools and silks and needles, the amount consumed weekly led Mémé at last to fear that the *Cigale* in lavish generosity was working a set of a dozen Empire chairs. She did suggest, after the eighteenth monthly payment for the frame, the advisability of buying one outright, but Madame de Montargot explained that she was hiring it from a friend, who infinitely preferred the present arrange-

ment to that of selling. Then the dealer in antique furniture declined putting aside the chair any longer, and announced that he must accept a recent offer of a hundred francs unless it was paid for by his client, Madame de Montargot, at the very special terms he had made with her, namely, fifty-nine francs, on the following day. Could Mémé lend this sum until the treasure was found? The pumping had ceased, and news was expected any day now, when she should be repaid the loan a hundred-fold. Mémé paid it after a futile protest that she really only cared to possess the needlework. I have an inward conviction that chair found an immediate lodgment at the Mount of Piety, where so much of the *Cigale's* property already reposed—anything, in fact, on which five francs could be raised.

None of us ever saw that Empire chair; perhaps it was as well, since Gustave had threatened to smash it into a thousand fragments if it ever appeared on the scene.

The end came after three years' patient endurance on the part of Mémé—the end of the Empire chair, that is. Madame de Montargot wrote one day saying that an American lady, visiting the Institution, had seen the needlework just on the verge of completion, had become

enraptured with it on the spot, and when informed it was not for sale, had offered a price so advantageous that Madame de Montargot felt it would be a folly and an iniquity to refuse it. In exchange, however, she was going to work her dear friend a *tabouret.*

Mémé wrote urgently entreating to be spared the *tabouret,* but in vain. The *tabouret* is now developing an appetite as rapacious as the Empire chair, and poor Mémé sighs :

" It was, after all, better when the *Cigale* she only danced and sang. The case is much more serious now she becomes an industrious *fourmi.*"

VII

A POET'S RÉUNION

ODILE'S marriage has justified her intuition. Even the croakers, like the dismal *croque-morts* never far to seek, are fain to acknowledge that it is a success, if that term may be applied to the perfect happiness of two such abnormal beings as a savant and a poetess.

Odile's last volume of verse surpasses everything she has written before. The *Revue des Deux Mondes* described some of her sonnets as "veritable pearls," while the *Revue Femina* likened the poetess herself to a rare orchid unfolding one by one her gemlike petals to our delighted gaze; and neither of the reviewers were personal friends.

Odile accounts for her *épanouissement*, as she terms it, by pointing to her married life. "Love is the most great of all the teachers; Love gives in one year more of insight, or profoundness, than life without love is capable of giving in fifty years."

Wishing to draw her out, I remind Odile that love and she had been long acquainted before she met her savant.

"That was but the shadow which preceded the reality," Odile hastens to assure me: "The love which consummates itself in marriage, that love alone can truly be said to have attained; for marriage is the magic touch-stone by which alone the true essence of love can be tested. Think, then, how few so-called loves survive this ordeal supreme! Only the true gold, *ma chérie*, and that becomes stronger, firmer, more enduring. This is the mystery of marriage," she adds, almost in a whisper, her eyes taking on such a look as the Delphic priestess might have worn.

"How do you classify the love of Dante for Beatrice?" I inquire softly, for Odile always inspires me with a desire to look at the other side of the moon, and on this subject of marriage and its mystery, after eighteen months of married life, she assumes a knowledge far exceeding anything her mother has experienced. That sweet and gentle lady listens and learns, wonder and amusement mingling in the adoring look she keeps for her unique child—unique in every sense of the word.

"And to think that she is my little one,

fabricated by me!" I heard her once murmur to herself in a sort of ecstasy and awe, after Odile had been telling us all at dinner the full significance of marriage.

It is certainly most encouraging to the wavering to hear her discourse. For myself I have always inclined to the fear expressed by Monsieur Maeterlinck lest the institution of marriage should, with its too legal and hard-and-fast aspect, mar a beautiful and ideal love. And was he not both seer and prophet who declared that the first step down from her pedestal was the one his beloved would take when she descended to place her hand in his?

But Odile has no patience with the genuine idealist. The case of Dante and Beatrice, therefore, always drives her into an *impasse*, for she adores the *Vita Nuova* and yet finds from her very practical standpoint the conduct both of Dante and Beatrice little short of idiotic.

"*Ma foi!*" she says, "that poor Dante, to content himself with a love which found expression in ideal longings and visions and verses only, when he might have experienced the lover's passionate kiss and close embrace, that see you I find fantastic and unsuitable to the life on this earth."

One of Odile's favourite maxims is, "It

suffices not to look high, one must touch the goal." When I reply with some such quotation as, "A man's reach must exceed his grasp, else what's a heaven for," she warns me solemnly against flying machines and balloons, and recommends me to abjure poetry and go in for a course of natural science.

It is certainly interesting to note how Odile has succeeded in "touching her goal" and grasping with a firm hand her ideals without damaging them.

In spite of her advice, however, that I should renounce the poets, she soon after this offered to take me to one of those select *réunions des poètes* which are occasionally held at the houses of the various distinguished leaders of this literary coterie. I felt torn between the desire to go and the fear of finding myself like the poor bewildered pigeon who inadvertently flew into the Vatican Hall when the cardinals in solemn state were all assembled awaiting the choice of Pope to fall on one of their number. The poets, like the cardinals, permit no audience, so it was useless to think of taking up an unobtrusive position among admiring spectators. At these *réunions* there are none present who are not worthy to wear the "palms," and even as each cardinal sat under a Papal

canopy so does each poet sit under the halo of Academy-crowned works and of palms and orders accorded only to highest literary merit.

Mémé declared it gave her *des frissons* even to hear of such a company undiluted by commonplace prose mortals. Every one to his taste, but she was thankful I did not want her to accompany me to that affair.

"Poets should be mixed in the society in the proportion as the essence of vanilla is used in the *cuisine*," says Mémé. "Such people were intended only as a flavouring—an entire dish of the essence of vanilla!—for me, I say, thank you, no!"

I had accompanied Odile before to *réunions* of rather less exclusive kind, notably that one at which she had met her Fate. On these former occasions nothing could have been more cordial and charming than the Crowned Ones, making me feel they were not even aware of the distance between their Olympian heights and my lowly valley. And even as the flight of the pigeon round the Council Hall and the soft rustling of his wings had proved a not unpleasing diversion to their Eminences, so the flight of my nervous fingers over the keys of the piano had diverted the Academicians, and they had greeted with delighted acclaims my musical accompaniment to Odile's verse, inviting me to

join them again whenever I found myself in Paris. One or two among them had even begged I would seek and find in my "soul so musical" strains and harmonies which would suitably interpret their own verse. Knowing, however, of what big sacrifices these dear French people are capable, in fulfilling their law of "politeness of the heart," I spared them.

What really decided me, however, to overcome all qualms on the occasion of this particular *réunion* was hearing that it would take place at a certain fascinating old palace in the St. Germain quarter, still standing untouched as when the brilliant, witty, and beauteous company of the First Empire met in those salons to discuss and often to decide the great *coups d'état* of those exciting times.

At the kind suggestion of our hostess, Odile and I arrived some time before the rest of the company that I might see the "objects of interest." There was scarcely an "object" which might not be included under that head. Even the tortuous narrow little street, outwardly degenerated into an undeniable slum, but bearing the name of an ancient, historic house, struck the keynote of the glorious past as we entered the great double doors and passed into the

spacious stone courtyard. The broad stone stairs worn by the feet of many a generation of noble cavaliers and gay courtiers, the finely wrought iron balustrade, the exquisite stucco designs over doorways and ceilings, all took one back as by enchantment to the great France of the past, the France of the magnificent Louis Quatorze and the great Cardinal. Once inside the long suite of *salles de réception*, one remembered no more the Paris of to-day. The Republic, the President, the Chamber of Deputies, the Municipal Councillors and all their ways, vanished like a dream—a bad dream I had almost said, but considering what good times the Paris of to-day has given me, that would indeed be black ingratitude on my part.

"In this room I have united only the furniture of Madame Récamier. This here was her harp," said our hostess. This harp, which after sounding in the elegant salons of the Rue du Mont Blanc, accompanied its beautiful owner in later days to the seclusion of the two little cells in the Abbaye aux Bois—those little cells transformed soon into the most brilliant of salons by the illustrious company her presence ever attracted. M. de Chateaubriand, De Montmorency, Constant, Joubert, Fontains, how they all, like the strings of this harp, had vibrated to her

touch of magic "sympathy and comprehension."

And as I stood before the dainty instrument, perfect and intact, the silent strings had such an air of waiting, it needed but a step into the world of fancy to see a graceful white-clad figure glide up to the gilded stool with its seat of old brocade, her long slender arms lovingly encircle the harp and her fingers dreamily wander across the strings, while the distinguished figure of Chateaubriand stood in the shadow and watched her wistfully. She who was, he tells us on looking back at the end of life, "the hidden source of all his affections."

"How that harp it exhales a charm full of dignity and grace, is it not so?" observed our hostess. I responded heartily, and found myself asking, rather to the surprise of the present owner, whether Madame Récamier did not come often and play. She looked at me a moment, and then answered with quick comprehension:

"But yes, yes, she comes—they come all, know you! When I am here alone at the hour of twilight, or sometimes in the evening when I have no *monde* and am sitting myself at the old escritoire in that corner where I write and make my poems, then all of a stroke I feel

myself no longer alone. I regard and here is Napoleon who installs himself in this chair—you see it is this one here on which he seated himself always when he visited the beautiful Récamier, she who was the unapproachable for him, the invincible, the Emperor, even as for all men. And she, the beautiful chaste, she reclines here on this little canopy severe of the style Greek Empire. Already you know it well, is it not so? for it is painted by David in the famous portrait which is at the Louvre. At another time it is Madame de Genlis who enters with her gay laugh, followed by a train of beaux who make her the court, while she entices them ever into playing some new *tour* on her friends, with her disguises and her comedies and her mischief—not the sober *gouvernante* of later days, the *châtelaine* of Belle Chasse with her royal charges, but the giddy young Comtesse who ceased never to sing, to dance, and to play the comedy. Madame de Stael too, brilliant, witty, and of an ugliness adorable. Ah, yes, they come here all of them! I ask myself often," she sighed, "what think they of us—if they do not despise altogether our modern life so vulgar, so ordinary."

"You at least, *chère Baronne*, you no one can reproach with leading the life vulgar and

ordinary," said Odile. "Your life resembles a jewelled goblet of Cellini filled to the brim with the purple wine of the gods."

"Ah, *chère amie*, but my heart is empty of joy as a nest of the autumn," she answered, with a profound sigh, as a quick change swept over her expressive sensitive face. "Since that my Jean is departed, my well-beloved, all my happiness is dead. And to-day my sorrow is keenly renewed, for I have passed this morning in arranging and sorting the two great *armoires* which contained all his clothing, his little objects, etcetera. I was assisted by our faithful Nou-Nou, his nurse, who, as you know, is with me since the birth of Jean and is altogether of the family. The poor one her heart was torn even as mine. Until this day imagine to yourself we could never find the courage, neither she nor I, to enter his room. Now that my *belle-fille* arrives with her two babies I am forced to this *triste* necessity, but it was for me a cruel test—at the sight of his first uniform the tears poured from my eyes, and the poor Nou-Nou she was shaken with sobs, the emotion has rendered her really suffering. For me I heard again his voice as he embraced me for the last time, *Adieu, Maman chérie, adieu.*"

"How long is it now that he has departed?"

asked Odile, in a breaking voice. We were all either weeping or on the verge of it.

"It is already ten months that he has been *là bas*," answered the Baronne to my astonishment, for naturally I had concluded that the *petit* Jean had departed this life, and was thinking of him in my own mind as *là haut*. To hear his mother quietly consigning him *là bas* was a shock till Odile mentioned *l'Afrique* and *l'Abyssinie*.

"It is a country atrocious," the poor Baronne shuddered. "The savage beasts they promenade themselves everywhere; there exists not a valley, not a mountain, where one may feel oneself secure. Jean he inhabits a hut constructed of mud and sticks and for nourishment he eats the soup of the hippopotamus. The poor little one he finds all that delicious! The life in full air it makes his joy! He recounts in his last letter how he has killed a great rhinoceros, of all the savage beasts of the chase it appears this one is the most dangerous. Since five nights I dream of that rhinoceros. This morning I could support it no longer, I sent to Jean a letter imploring him to return to Paris without delay."

"Oh, dear Madame, do not have fear," I urged her, for I happened to be in a position to offer every reassurance. "My brother has

just returned in safety from a mission to Abyssinia, and while there he killed six large rhinoceros, besides seven lions and five elephants, and some of his friends killed of these beasts many more. All have returned in safety, finding themselves fortified and refreshed, with the air robust and a health perfect. Let him rest, Monsieur, your son, if he finds himself so happy," I pleaded. "He will return to you, do not fear; and with so much to recount and a so great joy in recounting it, that you too will rejoice that he went *là bas*."

"Ah, but you other English women—the mothers, the sisters, the wives, you are truly astonishing! For you have, one must avow it, the affections strong and sincere, of a great fidelity and tenderness. Yet you permit them to depart your well-beloved, to the end of the world for the years and the years. Like the ladies of the Middle Ages, yourselves you attach the armour, yourselves place in the hand the sword. "But say, then," and she looked at me with as keen an interest as if I had announced myself own sister to the mighty Nimrod, "is it you yourself who possess a brother who has killed six rhinoceros? *Mon Dieu*, imagine it then—six!"

She seemed to think far more of these beasts

than of the lions and elephants; and not desiring to add a new terror to her life, I omitted to mention that the lions, on more than one occasion, nearly succeeded in taking a life before yielding their own; while in one instance the elephants numbered over eighty, an energetic company who would have made nothing of trampling flat the city of Paris had it stood in their path.

"In verity, yes, Madame," I assured her, "my brother has brought to us some of their tusks; they are strongly interesting and curious. Also he brings back a health superb, for the climate is magnificent even as the country itself. Oh, it is good to travel, to live, to see this wonderful world, do you not find it, dear Madame?"

We were seated on Madame Récamier's sofa. I took her hand. I was thinking how sick poor Jean would be to get that letter summoning him home, for he would certainly feel it his duty to return if his mother desired it.

"Yes, my dear Demoiselle," she answered, pressing my hand, "you render me courage. It is true I have often thanked the good God that my two sons, neither one nor the other, possess the taste of the idlers, the *flaneurs*, the *poules mouillées*, who pass their lives on the

boulevards, in the *cafés*, and read but the scandals of the journals."

And then she told me how her Jean had gone, when he had but twenty-two years, on a botanical expedition to some country which adjoins both the land of Somali and that of Abyssinia. He had journeyed with some Fathers of the "Saint Esprit" who were starting a mission *là bas*. His outfit sounded to me somewhat quaint, but his mother was evidently proud of it. Twenty-two cases had Jean taken, seven of them containing provisions from Potin of the first quality. Twelve dozen had been his number for every article in his trousseau, from Charvet's finest silk pyjamas and cambric shirts, down to tooth brushes. I exclaimed at the tooth brushes, but the Baronne explained they were dispersed among the twenty cases, so that if any loss or misfortune should arrive one might find a few in whichever case survived.

"I will write again to my Jean," she sighed. "Your counsels, dear Mademoiselle, have gained me; for the rest they are even as those of the 'Nou-Nou' of my Jean, she desires always that her little one follows his own wish, me also I will not force him to return if he desires to remain."

And now the guests began to arrive, and the

anxious, tearful mother instantly changed to the charming, witty *femme du monde* with a *bon mot* and a happily turned little greeting to suit exactly the case of each newcomer.

We passed into another salon, where tea, lemonade, grenadine, and other *sirops* were served with *petit-fours* and *brioches*. The dainty Sèvres cups were those out of which the grandmother of our hostess had often sipped in company with the *bas-bleus*, *beaux esprits*, and all the gay society of the past.

We were a small and select company, about twenty in all, several of whom I had met before, notably the old Duchesse de Rocheville, with blue eyes which at eighty-three looked out on the world with the fresh keen interest of twenty-five ; also the dark-eyed poet of passion, he of the stormy past, Prince Taglialuna, and she, whose presence ever gladdens all hearts, the young high-priestess of Roumania, now become one of my best friends, in spite of the fact that her heroic ballads invariably have a most disastrous effect upon my eyes.

"*De grâce, chère* Leonore," I begged her as we greeted each other, "have pity on me to-day and recite nothing which shall touch me the heart."

"What shall be then my theme—choose thou," she laughed.

"That it be of lovers and of moonlight and all those machines there, but not of your 'dead soldiers,' nor of your valiant 'Heiducks,' and, above all, not of *Le Cœur Noir*, or as you know for me it is finished."

"Well, I will seek," she said. "I think I have something which will leave you altogether without a prick. But it is hard that you deprive me of my most responsive auditor. It is even as though I prayed you not to touch at the fine piano of Liszt in the salon there, but to play instead your nocturne of Chopin upon the gilded armchair of Napoléon."

"I must consider my appearance," I answered her firmly. "Only the very beautiful or the very vain can ignore an affair of so great importance."

All the poets had now assembled, the last to arrive being a tall stately lady who was at once conducted by our hostess to the famous armchair, and begged to occupy the seat of her great ancestor, which she did with the laughing remonstrance that she was sure he would find her the least worthy to do so of any one there present.

We had returned to the Salle Récamier, where seats had been arranged in a large circle. I found myself between Odile and a small spare

man with a pale, plaintive little face and a big roll of manuscript under his arm. Odile presented him as "Monsieur de la Guimaigre, one of our young poets the most distinguished."

I opened the conversation by inquiring whether he was interested in modern English poetry.

"I regret infinitely to not speak or read the English, Mademoiselle," he answered, with a despairing gesture of both small hands; "thus am I deprived of much pleasure one assures me. It is the verity pure that I know but one sole line of the poesy modern of your admirable country. In the Quartier Latin the young English painters I once heard them sing it in chorus. It is of your great poet Monsieur Kieperling. I will remind myself"—he paused. "*Ah, voilà!*—'Dookess son, Cookess son, land in ze Table Bay, Dookess son, Cookess son, pay—pay—pay.'[1] It is because of the great simplicity alone that as you perceive I have retained these lines in the head. It signifies the desire for peace—is it not so?—experienced by all the classes of England during the unhappy war with the Boers? One tells me," he included Odile, who was listening with interest, "that this poem had a great vogue in England, and

[1] With apologies to Mr. Rudyard Kipling.

that by it several millions of francs were gained! Without doubt, the poets being more rare in England than by us, they are able to gain much —yes?"

I really did not know where to begin, so I did not attempt anything, but left him satisfied that England has no living poet worth mentioning save "Monsieur Kieperling" and that "pay—pay—pay" was a prayer for peace and the finest of that poet's productions. I replied that without doubt he "had reason," poetry of the standard of the French Academy was comparatively rare with us, and those of our poets who did emerge from obscurity were doubtless by consequence in a fair way to become millionaires.

"Ha! you have then of them besides Monsieur Kieperling?" But here he was interrupted by a gentle "Sh——" going round the circle, and a tall lady, with long aquiline nose, dark eyes and eyebrows, and generally tragic appearance, stood up and recited a sonnet, as yet unpublished, belonging to a series entitled "The Hours —Black, White, and Blue." She commenced with a "Black Hour," pitch black to describe it accurately, and on being encored gave us one of the "Blue," an admirable contrast, and showing great dramatic power in the reciter; Odile told me afterwards she was a prominent rising star.

After this the dark Prince was called upon, and following his impassioned lyric, which was too like a cataract to affect me much, came a general request for something from Léonore de Vasova. A second volume of her verse had just been crowned by the Academy, an unusual distinction for a foreigner, on her lace *fichu* reposed the small violet rosette. She gave me a smile, and then began, "*Dis moi des mots très vieux.*" That opening sounded harmless enough, but she has a knack of putting something into any subject that prevents one's remaining serenely calm and indifferent. Who could have suspected that she was going on to ask for words "worn by age," "warm with human vows;" "like the ringdoves whose wings circling around the ancient homes envelop the vanishing desires—words possessing the august charm and peace of those fine gleams by which life exalts and chastens its elect."

The poem is published now, so I will not spoil it by quoting more. The "old words," still clinging about the walls of the ancient palace in which we were met, seemed floating all about us—the words of love, of hate, of intrigue and war, of light-hearted gaiety, of tragic despair—the poem of Léonore seemed to waken them all once more into life.

The old Duchesse and the lady of the house of Buonaparte announced themselves profoundly touched ; and the former, who had consented to allow some of her poems to be recited after the performance of Léonore, begged to postpone her contribution until she had time to "replace" herself, "For the moment those 'old words' had her," she declared, "in their grasp."

So my neighbour, Monsieur de la Guimaigre, was called upon, and after much demurring and assuring us he had in verity nothing suitable, the manuscripts, which at the kind insistence of our hostess he had brought, containing "but an excursion of the fancy, a thing rambling, chaotic, obscure, worse still he feared, boring." On being assured, however, that we all panted to hear it, with sudden resolution he began :

"*La Brebis Errante*," he announced in mournful tones. As he proceeded it seemed to me he took on even the voice and profile of his heroine, and I have ever since identified that innocent quadruped with his own personality. He had not overstated his case in calling the poem obscure, as far as I was concerned, though even I could not fail to recognise the wonderful workmanship of the composition, like some delicate network of Chinese ivory carving. But on this very account, perhaps, I continually lost the

meaning which, Odile says, like a fine, almost invisible, golden thread, ran through the mazes of those twenty-seven verses, before that erring sheep "fetched home." Whether we left her dead or alive I am still uncertain, though when the poet resumed his seat at my side I summoned up courage to inquire. He looked at me blankly and bleated piteously: "You have, I fear, found me tedious, Mademoiselle? *Hélas!* I have committed then the worst of crimes." Our hostess tore him from me while I was still vehemently disclaiming the charge, leaving me to this day in ignorance as to the fate of that *brebis*.

The poet was led off to be presented to the old Duchesse, that she might herself make him her compliments. He was surrounded with congratulations, every one contributing a new adjective of praise. The "*brebis*" was "fine," "subtle," "aromatic," "deliciously naïve," "triumphantly convincing." The distinguished lady who occupied the chair of Napoleon rose, and, towering above the author of the "*brebis*," smiled upon him her approval like some benign Pallas Athene.

Several lesser recitals followed on this veritable *succés d'estime*, and then Odile was begged for one of her last inspirations on "The Marriage

Mystical." You can say things in poetry, specially French poetry, which would be most difficult to express in English prose, and a musical accompaniment is a further assistance.

"The music of Mademoiselle," said my hostess, leading me towards the piano, "gives to the poems of our Odile at the same time the charm of mystery and the gift of illumination."

With such an introduction I wonder now I had the effrontery to attempt to meet such requirements, but I was allowed no time for drawing back; my steps were hurried forward towards the adjoining salon, where stood the famous piano on which Liszt had been wont to play when he visited the house. The last occasion had been when passing through Paris only a few weeks before his death. Something of the great musician's spirit lingers, I am convinced, in that instrument, for the notes have caught the trick of singing, long, sweet, sustained sounds, without the assistance of any third pedal, in a way I have never heard from any other piano.

Invoking the spirit of Liszt, therefore, I let my fingers and my fancy wander dreamily after the mystic fantasies of Odile, and, like Dante, I followed my Beatrice into weird abodes peopled with strange company—dreamy, shadowy,

yet animated by intense motions of the most human kind.

Odile firmly refused the chorus of petitions for yet another of her "ravishing creations." Taking me by the hand, she insisted on my sharing the applause that our audience so generously lavished.

Feeling twin sister to the *brebis errante*, I was led up to the Duchesse de Rocheville, who, with tears in her eyes, thanked me for the "pain so sweet" my "inspired music" had caused her. She begged I would come and visit her on her day, adding as an inducement the promise to show me some old melodies of *La Bretagne* which her mother had collected among the peasants.

After this Léonore read one of the "trilogies" for which the Duchesse is famous, and the old lady listened, her girlish blue eyes fixed intently on Léonore, while her lips moved in unison with each word as it was uttered. I regret to say, in the interest of watching the remarkable old face and the keen vitality it expressed, I never even heard the trilogy, except as a rhythmic sound.

After several others of the magic circle had contributed their share came a universal request for something from our hostess.

"*Hélas, mes amis*, but me I have absolutely nothing—nothing—nothing!" she answered. "*De grâce* insist not, I pray you, for it is the verity pure that to-day I have not one word of prepared."

"Give us then something *à l'improviste*," cried a chorus of voices. "Ah, famous! We will have a poem in the blank verse *à l'improviste*. There is no one who succeeds in that art there like our Baronne."

The Baronne covered her face with both hands, and protested that she had not one single idea in the head. "All these days here she thought only of her absent son, her poor little Jean, who found himself *là bas* in that country abominable of the Africa. "Not possible to compose sonnets with such an anxiety atrocious on the heart—was it not so?"

But here the voices which replied were not in unison, and a lively discussion was taken up all round the circle. Some said, "Ah, it is true that! When one suffers, one creates not. For that the brain works in liberty the heart must be tranquil." Others agreed that out of the suffering and pain of the heart had resulted the finest work, the highest art. "Yes," joined in Odile, "but remember always that the pain

must be rather an experience which is of the past than an agony of the moment."

Our hostess listened, taking no part for some minutes, then suddenly she stood up, saying, "My friends, yourselves have suggested to me a theme—I throw myself on your goodness, your indulgence—*Là voilà!*"

I can only give the subject of her improvisation in the most imperfect prose translation, without any attempt to render the poetic form into which she so cleverly threw it without any preparation.

"A Siegfried of To-Day," announced the Baronne, and rapturous applause encouraged her to proceed.

"He has left far behind him the life enticing and luxurious of the city. The beauty of Woman holds him no longer, Art allures him not, Ambition seeks in vain to detain him in her seductive embrace. Clothed in his simple habit of the chase, with a little knapsack on the shoulder" (involuntarily the twelve dozen tooth-brushes flashed before me), "at his side the sword of steel and strong revolver, the young man sets forth, accompanied only by one faithful servitor, for the wild lands untrodden by human foot, the lands of the primæval forests, the inaccessible mountains, the foaming on-rushing cataracts

—the savage lands of liberty. He would seek, scarcely as yet he knows, but it exists in the soul as the ideal—always in some form it is the ideal which he seeks. And to attain it he must surmount, he must vanquish all the obstacles he encounters, all the perils deadly and terrible which rise up in his path.

"The night arrives; he reposes himself under the pines of the forest, black and tranquil even as death. Far above him the brilliant stars of the Southern Cross keep guard like sentinels who watch over the young wanderer. The morning song of the bird awakens him with the dawn. As for Siegfried, so for him also, the bird is a prophet. He urges the youth onward, always onward, to encounter new adventures, to overcome new perils. His food is gained by the chase; the soup of the hippopotamus, and the milk of the cocoa-nuts flung at him by the monkeys, these suffice for the repasts of himself and his faithful servitor.

"All day he journeys by the steep precipices and ravines of the mountains, by the foaming torrents. He passes sometimes in a valley the mud houses of a tribe of the aborigines. These people cast on the travellers the hungry glances of the cannibal, but the young man shows

himself of an air so courageous, of a force so invincible, he disarms their bad intention. To these savages he appears as a being from a higher sphere, a young god descended to this earth; they permit him to pass with his follower unharmed. But as night advances the heart of our hero grows big with the presentiment that the conflict supreme approaches. In the distance a mighty tempest gathers, and mingling itself with the growling of the thunder comes yet another sound, which announces the approach of the monster, the terror of all the country, the ferocious rhinoceros!

"Bidding his faithful valet await him in the security of a cave, he advances now alone. The blood of the young hero races through the veins like fire, as he gathers together all his forces and precipitates himself towards the encounter. The monster, he also, has scented from afar the man, hereditary foe of his race, he also puts himself to run forwards *ventre à terre*. Resembling to the two great forces primitive of good and evil they clash the one against the other with an antagonism inextinguishable, mortal. This struggle is until the death! All the two, they know it. The trees of the forest regard and tremble, the little birds have ceased their song. The heart of the faithful servant is

cracking with fear for his young master, but he dares not disobey and quit his post.

"Now the battle grows fiercer ; the sword of the hero has covered with slashes the thick hide of the monster who by these wounds is roused to a fury of desperation. Already the form gigantic and massive overwhelms the young man, the great tusks are in train to pierce him through the heart, when leaping with a marvellous agility on to the back of his foe, with a cry of triumph our hero pulls the revolver. The ball enters by the ear of the monster and traverses the brain. Like the giant Goliath before the young David, that one rolls himself on the earth, the despair and rage of the defeated devour him. Yet one more time he raises himself, the eyes flashing vengeance, and with the roar of the beast who permits not to escape him the prey he desires, he leaps on the young one. But this time our hero has the sword prepared and poised well for the onslaught, the evil one he greets with a stroke superb, magnificent, and thrusts him through the heart. 'In the name of my mother,' he cries, 'die, thou miserable one, perfidious and abominable!'

"As the fall of a citadel crashes and overturns in ruins on the ground, so the monster falls, stretched on the earth, never to raise himself

again, while the life blood flows from his body in a mighty stream through the forest, announcing to all the trembling creatures the death of their enemy, the joyful signal of their liberty regained.

"Thus our young Siegfried he fought himself with his first dragon—thus he overcame the tryant and won the victory! But he turns not yet towards his own country, towards the house where awaits him the mother desolate and lonely. Ah no, he pursues his path seeking always the ideal, that Brunhilde, to reach whom one must pass through the wall of fire. Will he find her ever in this life? Who knows? But one thing is certain, the mother, she who gave to him the sword, never must it be that her voice recalls him before his task is accomplished."

. . . . . .

How it came to pass I never knew, for every one was encoring, congratulating, and complimenting at once, when suddenly I found myself sharing the honours with my hostess as heroine of the moment. I think it began by her embracing me on both cheeks, her own wet with tears of most genuine emotion. The next thing I knew was that the descendant of Napoleon, after asking the Baronne to present us to each

other, was demanding of me gravely if in verity it was "six great rhinoceros which my brother himself had fought and slain?"

I was beset on all sides with congratulations and sympathy at possessing such a brother. The Baronne in reply to all interest shown in the deed of her young Siegfried pointed to me with:

"The brother of Mademoiselle, see you, he has killed of those beasts six! Besides the lions and the elephants in great abundance. God be thanked he is returned to England the life saved, the health excellent, and it is she, my dear young friend, if she permits me so to call her, who has restored me the courage, and who has inspired me also with this little improvisation."

Never in all my life have I felt such an absurd fraud as at that moment, standing up there in that distinguished circle, and shining with the glory, even though it was but reflected, of a mighty hunter! I who hate the sound of a gun, and look with suspicion upon even an unloaded revolver. And when I thought of how that brother of mine would laugh, could he have seen me receiving the congratulations on the slaying of those six rhinoceros, I became fairly hysterical.

As to the author of the *brebis*, he steered

as far away from my vicinity as possible, and regarded me with such a furtive look of apprehension it made me feel as though I had cast off my blue cloth costume and revealed the shaggy coat of a wolf.

As I passed him on going out, I could not resist saying, "*Bonjour, Monsieur, et au revoir,*" but he returned me only my "*Bonjour,*" with a distinct inflection of interrogation on the "*Mademoiselle.*"

Poets are a great joy, specially those of French nationality; even a rhinoceros handled by them becomes a winged dragon.

VIII

A DINNER "EN FAMILLE"

I RETURNED home with Odile after the *réunion* for a dinner *en famille* at her parent's house.

A family dinner in England is apt to be a dull affair, at least it has often struck me that way as compared with the French equivalent.

But in France conversation is as much a necessity as the plates. Every one talks, every one listens with interest to the opinions of others, even of those of their own family with whom they are on terms of daily intimacy. The children, instead of being told "to be seen and not heard," are encouraged to contribute to the general gaiety and amusement. "And thou, To-to, what thinkest thou? Say then." And To-to, if he should require this invitation, which is rare, will then raise his small voice and give you his point of view without in the least usurping the conversation, *à l'enfant gâté*, who all agree is a nuisance whether grown in England or France.

English people generally care only for the *tête-à-tête* talk, even at a small dinner. It is a form of conversation that certainly has its advantages, for two people can be as isolated at a dinner-table as on an iceberg, but it does not add to the general hilarity. We do not cultivate the round conversation as do our French neighbours. Most of us neither care to impart our own, or to hear the views of our belongings. We will listen to one who is regarded as a special authority on some subject, but he, far from encouraging conversation, generally puts an extinguisher on it by laying down the law as from a pulpit. This may be most instructive, but it is not conversation, and it is not gay.

There is one form of gaiety in general conversation, however, in which we certainly do excel our lively neighbours, both in the giving and taking, namely, the English speciality "chaff." Not that the French lack the sense of humour, but their notion of the humorous is different, quite startlingly so at times, while their politeness and dislike to hurting susceptibilities, restricts them from the wide area we permit ourselves when fairly started "chaffing." You might serve up his own language to a Frenchman mutilated past all possible recognition, but never would

the shade of a smile cross his expressive countenance, much less would he permit himself a little harmless chaff or amusement out of it. "*Parfaitement, Monsieur,*" is all you would get, with the politest of bows, unless with sudden inspiration he divined your obscure meaning, when he would repeat the phrase for you correctly, with consummate tact ignoring it was not quite the one you had used. And all this just to spare your feelings and make you pleased with yourself and him!

We were only six at the dinner *en famille* to which Monsieur and Madame Lestang so kindly made me welcome. Besides our hosts, Odile and her Italian husband Carlo Montano, there was a doctor nephew, Monsieur André Devereux, a frequent guest, his own home being, for his children's sake, an hour out of Paris and away from his work.

After speaking of the *réunion* and the poets who had assembled at Madame de Valmort's, a discussion followed on Odile's poem of the "Marriage Mystical," which soon extended itself to married life in general and the relation between the sexes. Each one gave their view, and was listened to with interest and patience.

Monsieur Lestang began. He is a philo-

sopher and writer of note. His views are much in harmony with those of Descartes and of Spinoza, I believe; he quotes both in support of much that he says, though Odile maintains that living in a later day he sees further than either of those two sages of the past. I do not know, but any way he is a perfectly charming old gentleman with a head every sculptor and painter wish at once to reproduce.

"Man alone can create," he declared emphatically: "the reasons for this they are physiological, they are fundamental, they are irrefutable. But the vocation of the woman it is superb, it is beautiful. For she it is who must inspire the man, she who must create for him the atmosphere, at the same time sympathetic and stimulating, in which alone his best work is possible, guarding him well from the little worries and disturbances of life, ordering all for his happiness, for his health. This is the high destiny of the woman, to be the guardian, the mother of the man and the child, and I repeat, it is superb!"

He threw back his fine old head, his eyes flashed. Surely he had placed woman where she must feel honoured indeed to find herself. He paused, and his wife took up the theme:

"Ah, my friend, but think then the fate of

the woman, it is all the same cruel. The devotion, the sacrifice without doubt that it is superb, it is fine, but it is the martyrdom, and with the martyrdom one suffers. I concede to you that this is, as you say, her destiny, but not for the reason that she is incapable to create. A woman, as you yourself have written my friend, if she renounces to the *rôle* of the wife and the mother, as for example did Rosa Bonheur and other great artistes, is capable to create the work noble and inspired, even as the man. No, it is because only by the life of the affections, the life of love, that the heart of the woman is satisfied, for this cause she creates not with the brain unless the great love fails her which she seeks. The woman is compelled to satisfy, if possible, the demands of her heart, otherwise her whole nature becomes inharmonious and lacks the perfect unity. Yet it is only by the cruel sufferings that the woman arrives at obliterating her own individuality, at annihilating her own genius. To support the man she must lose herself, stifle all in herself which does not conduce directly to his greatness and happiness, and aid him in attaining the most excellent of which he is capable. But she suffers, my friend. Ah yes, even as the bird when one cuts him the wings that he may rest and contribute to our

happiness by singing to us in the cage, even as the tree suffers when one tears it from the roots to form for ourselves a staff to support the steps on the mountain path."

She sighed, the poor staff who had once been a green tree.

"But no, but no, you have wrong, all the two," cried Odile, eagerly entering the lists. "*Papa* and *Maman*, the one and the other, you regard not this question with enough profoundness." She laid down her knife and fork and clasped her hands together.

"*Mon enfant*," interrupted her mother nervously, "remind thyself always that our dear little friend here is not yet married as are we. Betty can be shocked at what thou shalt say with thy mode profound of treating this subject."

"Ah, Betty she is English, and with them the young girls are altogether different. They are very intelligent, they read the romances and go to the theatres even as the women married. Is it not so, Betty?" I nodded assent, and she went on: "So I continue—the man and the woman they complete each the other; they two make one perfect being. It is not that in their union either must stifle the individuality or must obliterate the ego. Altogether to the contrary, the one and the other they rise only by this

perfect mingling of the two into one, to their most high development. This is the meaning of marriage, a unity not only physical but mental and spiritual. The qualities specially feminine of the woman, the delicate intuition, the subtle fancy, the sensitive perception, these she infuses into the man, even as from him she derives the force, courage, and purpose in which he exceeds her. Thus together they contribute each one their part to fabricate the child of his brain, even as they both share the child she holds at her breast. They are one, and the intermingling is so complete no longer is it possible to separate the two individuals. In the true marriage, even as in the old pagan legend of the origin of sex, the two halves originally one being, but divided by the gods who dreaded a rival, meet again, and form one complete and perfect person."

"*Ah, ça, mais c'est épatant!*" cried Odile's father, bringing his fist down on the table. "Hein! and thou, what sayest thou, my friend?" he inquired of his son-in-law. Signor Montano's magnetic electrical eyes were fixed on his wife with an expression still reflecting the honeymoon.

"Me? Ah, me, I listen; I am the ears for we two, even as Odile she is our voice, see

you!" And his smile showed his perfect contentment with the arrangement.

"Well, for me I find that our Odile she deceives herself," struck in Dr. Devereux. "Thousand pardons, my dear cousin, but behold my ideas to me, the ideas of a man, 'a materialist, the miserable one,' you will say, but all the same a man ripe and with some experience of life, also still virile and sane, I hope. My view then is that the man and the woman, as my Uncle has declared to us, they are essentially and physiologically different and opposed. Never can they become one, and *parbleu*, never would one desire it! For is not this the cause that we men become enamoured of the woman, because she resembles us not, that she is a being apart from us. Never can we perfectly understand her, never though we hold her in our embrace do we entirely possess her. She eludes us, she escapes us always, and this is for us the eternal attraction of the woman. This is here her power over us, that she keeps for us always something of unexpected, something not yet known or attained. The day when a woman reveals to a man all her thoughts, abandons herself, her inmost being, to him wholly and without reserve, then in that hour all is finished for her. Her real power is

departed. She has lost her talisman. Ah, but yes, for that which renders the woman seductive, desirable, adorable, it is not so much that which she yields to us, as that which she still withholds. That the woman love with all her soul, that she sacrifice herself as upon an altar, even as my Aunt tells us is her true destiny and her most high happiness, but let her never reveal to the man that she has done so. Let her cause him to feel always that he has not entirely gained her, that still she eludes him, torments him. Let her be for him always a mystery. The being bisexual of our Odile, the perfect united man and woman, exists not ; it is the woman's idea, the poet's perhaps, but it is not the man's idea, and it is not life. Regard then the history of the human race, their loves, their passions. The women who have swayed the destinies of men and nations, the women for whom men have willingly lost their souls, have they not always been the mysteries ? The Cleopatras, the Hélènes, the Lamias, the Ninons ? I think I have one man here who is of my advice, is it not so, my Uncle ?"

But an eager quartette drowned the hearty assent of Monsieur Lestang. Each one present, like a Wagner chorus, took up his own *leit-*

motif and sang it out lustily, forming, as one listened, a curious orchestral effect. Odile and her father repeating in treble and bass clef respectively their original views, while the "Pilgrim's Song" of dear Madame Lestang waged persistent war against the Venusberg melody of her handsome nephew. The absurd thing is, that this dangerously good-looking and masterful Tannhäuser is, Odile declares, the most exemplary of husbands and devoted of fathers. I was urged to express my views in a solo as the chorus subsided. Dr. Devereux felt convinced that I absolutely agreed with him, though he said, of course, I would be too much woman ever to permit him the satisfaction of knowing it. I did allow I agreed with him on one point however, namely, that men and women are essentially different, and I never felt this more convincingly than when he was speaking.

"And for that reason you honoured me with your attention, perhaps even with your interest!" he answered triumphantly.

I wish I could say something of the dinner itself, but if things are all right, which they always are at Madame Lestang's, and the conversation interesting, I have no notion what dishes come and go. Generally, they have at

these family dinners fewer courses than we do in England, but, on the other hand, they eat much more. Mémé declares we take only samples of food, and spend all our time in changing the plates, and all our best efforts in decorating the table. "It is like your theatres, where you devote all your real art to the *mise en scène* and to the expensive costumes," says Mémé, "but have no training-schools for your actors."

But to return to the dinner, of which I fail to remember anything save the conversation that accompanied it. After a light skirmish on duelling, a practice warmly advocated by Dr. André, "to kill and to love" being, he maintained, "the two great and glorious primitive instincts in man," we embarked on our second big debate, namely, religion.

Imagine an English family flinging down on the dinner-table such a bombshell as, say, the immortality of the soul, and discussing it with far greater detachment than the policy of Mr. Chamberlain or the last folly of the County Councillors. By detachment I mean that though we were warmly interested, even excited, the argument never got within sight of anything in the nature of a disagreement or personal reflections. Each recognised that the other had a right to his own opinion, and gave it the

respect due to honest conviction. Nor did any hold the depressing belief that those who had not arrived at their own conclusions were necessarily on the road to perdition.

I should find it difficult to name any six members of an English family, who, while holding widely divergent views, could discuss this subject without running the risk of getting, most of them, "a false digestion."

"God is the sole logical conclusion," summed up Monsieur Lestang, after having proceeded at some length to demonstrate scientifically his position. He was taken up by Carlo Montano, who, while agreeing with his conclusions, maintained that his proofs were inferential rather than positive. The latter has a wonderful way of speaking and thinking—deep thoughts in language crystal clear; it is not surprising his books have been crowned by every academy of science in Europe. Generally he has in his mother-in-law a staunch supporter, but on this occasion she would have none of his views or those of her husband:

"The science, the logic, my friends, but what says that then to the soul? Nothing, nothing, nothing! If with all your science and your reason of the human mind you could show to me that there existed not God, that me I pos-

sessed not a soul, what would it make to me when within me my soul speaks with a voice which is much more strong and clear than your voices to you? The Catholic Church reveals to us God and the soul. She teaches us that our well-beloved who die we surely find again in another world; but if the heart, the intuition, did not also affirm these truths divine, they would be for us dead and useless. It is love which teaches, love which is our guide. Listen to your own hearts, my children, for there you shall hear the voice of God and know that very truly He exists."

"Well for me, it is not in the stars or in the heart that I desire to find what after all finds itself never," said Dr. Devereux. "I believe not in God, and I experience no need of Him. As, says my cousin, I am materialist. For me, I find far more divine than all your Gods of Christian or Jew a woman young and beautiful with her child upon the knees."

"Ah, but behold you worship after all the symbol, *mon cher* André, the symbol the most high that we other Christians we possess of God and of His love," cried Madame Lestang, with glistening eyes. "It is an idealist this one and a good Catholic also, who insists always that he is atheist and materialist."

Dr. Devereux clasped his Aunt's outstretched hand and pressed it, but disclaimed with energy her imputation of idealist or Catholic.

"Me I am at last of accord with André," said Odile's husband. "For me also there is nothing of more beautiful, of more divine in the world than the mother and the infant on the knees."

"Ah, but what thou sayst there, Carlo *mio*, it is not *gentil*, seest thou, since me I have no infant on the knees," observed Odile.

"But courage, courage, my daughter! One day very surely he will find himself there," cried her father, with his Jove-like laugh.

"That we drink to the health of that tarrying one," said Dr. André, raising his glass. "That he arrive soon, a fine boy, big and healthy."

All raised their glasses, and we clinked them as we drank to the toast of that one who, as Odile expressed it, had not as yet commenced his journey towards this world. She would have drunk the same toast with equal simplicity and absence of what is so truly named *mauvaise honte*, to the child who had begun that journey.

"Me I am philosopher," resumed Odile, after this little digression, "I find that Marc Aurèle he gives us in his philosophy all we require for this life. It is spoken nearly two thousand years ago, but have we yet heard anything

better than this: 'Let it make no difference to thee whether thou art cold or warm, if thou art doing thy duty, and whether thou art sleepy or wakeful, whether ill-spoken-of or praised, whether dying or doing something else. For it is one of the acts of life, this act by which we die; it is sufficient then in this act also to do well what we have in hand.'"

"With that excellent little discourse, which I perceive my Odile has chosen expressly for her old father, I allumine my good cigar, the two they agree well together," said Monsieur Lestang. The rest, including Odile and her mother, lit up cigarettes, and men and women we all moved into an adjoining room together for our coffee.

A little later a musical neighbour and his wife came in, and we spent the rest of the evening in the music-room, nearly every one playing, singing, or reciting. Dr. Devereux, after protesting rather indignantly that he knew nothing of music, and the arts were to him a closed book, sang us in a deep musical baritone, without accompaniment, some delightful old folk-songs of Lorraine and the Basque country—songs from the heart of the people, full of poetry and pathos. It was like drawing his eye-teeth to get them out of him, but I think when once started he

enjoyed singing, he did it so well, with just the necessary dramatic touch, and entire absence of self-consciousness. The French seem to have this dramatic gift by instinct, and it certainly contributes towards making their social life very amusing and gay.

IX

THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES

FOR years I had passed it by with just a glance of curiosity at its conventional, inexpressive exterior. Then hearing one day of a thrillingly *chaude séance*, I was seized with a strong desire to penetrate behind the inflexible-looking row of Corinthian pillars and the big doors which are never opened.

Uncle Jack on rare occasions rather enjoys attending a debate himself, but, like most Englishmen of the good old school, strongly discourages political tastes in his womenkind. The inconsistency of this masculine attitude has always been a source of joy to me, for these dear old gentlemen never hesitate to make unscrupulous use of women's money, influence, and personal attractions (*vide* the Kissing Duchess, and those of her type), to assist their political schemes. Yet, when it comes to the poor, hard-worked Dame, wishing to reap, through eyes and ears at least,

a little of what she has sown, they refuse to provide her even with a decent seat in the House of Commons.

This attitude being one of the honoured traditions of Uncle Jack and his house, I felt he was not the one to willingly exert himself in pulling the necessary bobbin which should lift the latch for me of the Chamber of Deputies.

Appealing to Mémé, I found not much better.

"*Ma foi*, but the Chamber it is an affair very vulgar, *ma chérie*. Better worth to go to the Monologues of Coquelin Cadet next week at the Bodinière. There you will distract yourself much more."

"I will go to all the two, dear Mémé," I answered promptly. "I am taking Uncle Jack to the Bodinière, and you to the Chambre des Députés."

Seeing Mémé look a little doubtful, I added, "Unless you find it more convenient that I accept the escort of Monsieur de Montchesnay ; he is very anxious to accompany me."

Being fifty, married, discreet, and reliable as a bishop, I felt he really was as suitable as Mémé herself, but she took me up sharply.

"Pretty idea! But no me, I find that not at all suitable. You have, my Betty, the ideas much too launched—too English. Never shall

I model you! I see well that I must resign myself to conduct you to this affair. I shall probably make a good sleep if *messieurs les députés* shout not too strongly."

I put small reliance in Mémé's rather lukewarm efforts to procure tickets, but made sure that Uncle Jack's old friend, Monsieur de Lauzières, a former deputy, would succeed without any difficulty. When, however, I made known my request, he greeted me with, "*De grâce*, Mademoiselle, seek not to be a witness of that *triste* spectacle, I pray it of you. Command of me what you will, save only to assist you in such a project."

"But, Monsieur, believe me," I insisted, "it is the one thing I desire, to see the men who rule France, and the fashion in which they do it."

"*Mon Dieu*, Mademoiselle, is it the ruin, the disgrace of our poor France, that you desire then to behold? Assuredly that is what one now sees at the Chamber of Deputies. I lower me the head when I think of it. Yes, me, I was one time a deputy—I was proud to call myself thus. Now, *hélas*, I can no more serve my unhappy country. She pushes far from her the faithful sons who would die for her. The bastards she takes in the arms seek only

to betray the army and the Church, and drag our poor France to her perdition."

The voice of the gallant old Count broke, his eyes were full of tears. I could only hasten to say, "Pardon me, Monsieur. I did not know that it was for you a subject so painful. I understand well how you must suffer. We will speak of it no more."

Nevertheless, my desire to judge for myself of the *triste* spectacle was in no way diminished. I determined to try some friend belonging to the Republican party, for I have the great advantage of being able to hear both sides, which keeps me from narrow prejudices, and entirely prevents my having any fixed opinions at all.

Suzette's husband, Monsieur Lemaire, had recently been elected a Municipal Councillor. Rather to the dismay of his *belle-mère*, and very much to that of his *belle-tante*, the aristocratic Madame de Bretelle, Monsieur Lemaire was developing more and more on strongly democratic lines. The *Petit Parisien*, the *Matin*, the *Siècle*, designated him respectively as a "man of the day," a "mounting spirit," a "*blocquard*," a "*franc maçon*," a "Dreyfusard," and, according to all Suzette's former friends, he was a "lost one." Her parents took comfort in the fact

of his being an excellent husband and son-in-law, with every prospect of soon showing himself an excellent father, and their Suzette was as happy as any one could be in a world where there is no sunshine without shadow.

It was to Monsieur Lemaire I next turned with my request. He thoroughly entered into my wishes. "Yes, he would do his best possible to procure me tickets for a hot *séance*. The approaching *séances* were, some of them, expected to be of an extreme heat. Impossible to announce the day precisely when tickets might be forthcoming, since they were allotted in turn to the Municipal Councillors."

Begging Mémé to hold herself in readiness for the eventful day, I waited impatiently.

A week later I received a *petit bleu* one morning from Suzette—

"*Ma chérie*, I sent you yesterday two tickets for the *séance* of to-day. It begins at two o'clock. Eugène says to you it will be of a heat to satisfy a salamander. Unhappily, I fear that in a moment of distraction I wrote by error the number 45, instead of 54, on the envelope. This may make a delay in the arrival of the letter, so it would be well to make inquiries at once at the post of your division—without

doubt you will obtain the letter in time.—Your all devoted SUZETTE."

Without doubt! All the same a horrible doubt commenced its gnawing as at nine o'clock I started out, without losing a moment. Arriving at the post-office of our quarter I made known my errand to three young gentlemen in succession. The last young gentleman took out a long paper and demanded peremptorily my name, age, address, and birthplace. He was proceeding to that of my father and mother when I suggested that all this information, though doubtless of thrilling interest to the Post-Office, could scarcely assist in restoring my lost letter, which contained tickets I must positively have before one o'clock that day.

"Ha! it is a question then of a letter lost," he cried, as though suddenly illuminated.

"Well, misdirected, as I have already explained to three persons here." I was getting a little tired.

"Dame! But it is not here the place where one brings the letters which find themselves badly directed. Those letters are united in another department of the Great Post. This document here," he pointed to my biography, "the chief of my department will despatch to

the Great Post. One will make a communication to you as soon as traces of the lost letter are discovered."

"Where do you think, Monsieur, that my letter is at this moment?" I asked in my politest tone.

Monsieur replied that it was impossible to pronounce with certainty on a question so difficult. The letter might have been detained by the concierge of No. 45, or it might be at the Bureau of the 8th Arrondissement, or possibly again it was already *en route* for the Great Post, its ultimate destination in all cases.

With renewed hope I set out for the concierge of No. 45. Undoubtedly he ought to have detained the letter until he had inquired whether it was for any of his *locataires*, but, alas, what a concierge ought to do is rarely that which he does do. This particular concierge was very pleasant and communicative.

"Yes, without doubt, it was my letter he had held in the hand here at this very door not two hours since. He had remarked that the envelope was of the Municipal Council, also he had detected distinctly the presence of tickets within that envelope.

"And now, where has the *facteur* carried that letter?" I inquired breathlessly.

"Ah, but there, Mademoiselle, is what is not easy to answer. All the letters of this division they are united at the Bureau of the 8th Arrondissement. But the post it is an affair very complicated see you. If I were in the place of Mademoiselle me I should resign myself to wait with patience until the Great Post sets in train the discovery and within ten, fifteen days assuredly Mademoiselle she will receive her letter."

I left my friend the concierge still discoursing, and drove to the office where he said the letters first halted. There again I supplied the interesting details of the names, ages, and birthplaces of myself and family, only to learn after interviewing three men and a boy that all that morning's letters had been forwarded to the Great Post an hour ago.

It was half-past eleven when I reached the Great Post, and I was sent to five different departments, and the verge of despair, before arriving at the one for erring letters. Then I had to wait until the one and only clerk disposed of a long string of seekers after lost or strayed property. He treated these victims with extreme curtness, which they bore with the meek, propitiatory spirit demanded by the French Jack in Office.

I began reeling off the formula which I was beginning to regard as the regulation opening to all official conversation, but was impatiently interrupted, and requested to keep to the subject in hand and describe the lost letter. Feeling both snubbed and ill-used, I inquired whether before we proceeded to fill in more forms this Monsieur would kindly tell me whether there was the remotest chance of recovering the letter that day before two o'clock.

"To-day! This day itself!" he cried, in shrill indignation. "*Parbleu*, but you imagine to yourself then, Madame, that the post conducts itself like an automobile!"

"I hoped that since my letter is here, actually here in this department, one could place the hand on it in the course of two hours," I answered bitterly. "In England," I continued, with a fine outburst of patriotism and disregard of experience, "we have such a perfectly organised system that I should have the letter I required in ten minutes."

"*Mon Dieu*, England, that is but a small affair. Remind yourself then that England is after all but an island. Here we are in France!"—he threw back his head proudly—"and here things march not so quickly. It will perhaps be fifteen days before your case comes up, for each the

inquiries must proceed in its turn ; no preference can be shown to your affair."

"Then it is useless to go into the matter," I answered, and in deep depression turned away to make room for a boney, determined-looking lady, who had been impatiently digging a market basket into my back.

Uncle Jack was not a bit sympathetic when I recounted my morning of failure. On the contrary, he seemed gently amused. I said very little, but took a desperate determination.

The following day, by the evening post, Uncle Jack handed me a letter, the corner of which he scrutinised with his glasses, murmuring incredulously: "Secrétariat Général de la Présidence! What in the world is this, Betty? It can't be for you, surely?"

I took the letter with an air of fine indifference, but my heart beat as I opened that important envelope and took out two white tickets, octagonal in shape, whereon I read the magic inscription: "Chambre des Députés. Billet d'Entrée pour une personne. Séance 96." A letter informed me that, in conformity with the wish I had expressed to him, the Secrétaire Général de la Présidence had the honour of addressing to me two tickets for the *séance* of the following day.

Uncle Jack watched me through his spectacles. "Who is your official friend?" he inquired.

"Only the Secretary of the Presidence," I replied airily; "he is delighted to think I care to attend a debate at the Chamber, and has sent me two tickets by return of post."

"Well, upon my soul!" observed my Uncle, which seemed to me rather an irrelevant remark. And then he laughed, as if he saw a huge joke in the situation; and yet I had never told him it was as the niece of my worthy Uncle, a devoted adherent of his party, that I had made my request to Monsieur le Secrétaire Général de la Présidence.

Mémé and I arrived at the entrance three-quarters of an hour before the *séance* commenced. One is warned to be there in advance, as only the boxes, not the seats, are numbered. The *huissiers*—magnificent gentlemen in black with massive silver chains hung round their necks, and clanking swords at their sides—ushered us into a vast ante-room. From there in due course we were passed on to other officials, who carefully examined the tickets and noted down our names and that of our distinguished patron.

We were among the first guests to arrive, and so were able to take our places, which were on

the first tier in the front row. The Chamber is semicircular in form, like the Bayreuth Opera House. In style it is plain as a Scotch church. All seats, both the galleries reserved for spectators and the members' benches in the arena, face the tribune and the President's chair which towers above it. The two galleries are divided off into boxes, each of which holds about a dozen people, the two front rows being reserved exclusively for *les dames*. The gallantry of this arrangement struck me forcibly as I called to mind that ghastly little shelf in the roof of the House of Commons reserved by my countrymen for *les dames*. No light, no air, no room on the cramped, narrow benches! Those in the back rows being condemned to lean forward at a painful angle to enable them to catch a word of what is being said, while an iron grille, specially constructed for the torturing of eye-nerves, obstructs the very imperfect view which only the front row can obtain from that height.

The honourable members and the male guests, so comfortably installed in the ease and luxury of the Gentlemen's Gallery, have declared repeatedly that the women like it, and surely they ought to know! besides, they assure their countrywomen that it is a compliment to the power of woman's seductive influence that the members should

feel themselves positively insecure unless their womenkind are stowed away out of sight and hearing. It is curious how entirely free the Frenchman appears to be from all fear of this kind ; and yet, the past would rather have justified an attitude of caution towards the alluring, fascinating Frenchwoman, with her political *réunions* and salons, where so often she has shown herself a very spider among the flies. English history has no such alarming page to record of woman's social power and political influence.

The guests' galleries soon filled up, the smartest toilettes mingling with the homeliest and dowdiest.

All leant forward eagerly to inspect Messieurs les Députés as they took their seats in the arena below, the ministers on the first benches nearest the tribune.

What struck me about all these deputies, whether they placed themselves on the Right or the Left side, was their business-like, work-a-day appearance. There was not a smart-looking man or the semblance of a dandy amongst them. That charming air of leisure and gentle boredom to be observed in the House of Commons was conspicuously absent. These deputies walked in briskly, as if intent on business. They left their hats outside, which

Mémé and I agreed was a pity, for nothing indicates so admirably the mental attitude as the position of the hat, whether thrown far back on the head, while the ministerial legs are gracefully balanced on the Speaker's table and the patent-leather boots rustle among the solemn pile of papers, or cocked waggishly to one side as a member from the Emerald Isle leaps up to answer a foe. The dignified hat, the shabby hat, the defiant hat ; the occupants of the Ladies' Gallery, who can see little else, become quite knowing in hats and what they cover.

But to return to the "Chamber of Horrors," as Mémé designates it. In spite of the sirens in such distracting proximity to the deputies' benches, I did not notice one glance in the direction of the guests' galleries. Those of my countrymen who incline to the belief that a Frenchman is a cross between a butterfly and a frog (I know it is the schoolboy's creed, but I have met it lustily surviving childhood) should go and study those sons of France who assemble in the Chamber of Deputies ; that delusion would at all events be once and for ever dispelled. A hive of bees could not take their business more seriously.

At last came a sound of drums in the distance, a stir among the gentlemen of the swords and

chains, and a voice proclaimed loudly: "Monsieur le Président."

Accompanied by a group of officials, the President of the Chamber entered and mounted at once to the heights of his Empire chair. In front of him stood a writing-table, also Empire style, very *chic*, and ready to his hand a large silver bell.

A group of ministers began an excited discussion at the foot of the tribune. I turned to Mémé to know if she recognised any of them. Dear Mémé is short-sighted, and could only guess vaguely at a bald head or a stout figure, though she never failed to supply me with a name. One of these shots I suppose happened to be singularly wide of the mark, for presently a voice behind us volunteered:

"Pardon, Mesdames, but that gentleman bald with the portfolio under the arm, and the voice which makes itself heard so penetratingly, it is Monsieur the Minister of the Finance, not Monsieur Waldeck Rousseau, that one finds himself to-day in the Senate."

I turned round eagerly. This was just what I wanted—some one I could ply with the innumerable questions that arise on such occasions.

An intelligent-looking young man with shrewd, alert, grey eyes, sat wedged in the corner just

behind us. Nothing could have been more conveniently arranged. Mémé thanked him rather distantly for his information, but I hastened to make up for any coldness on her part by begging him, with my sweetest smile, to have the extreme obligingness to inform me who were the various ministers of the front bench; specially I was interested in the group whose animated gestures seemed fast approaching a boxing match. The intelligent young man responded cordially. Before long all the people in our box were trying to catch what he said. His own politics declared themselves plainly:

"Those there," he said, indicating the benches on the left hand of the President, "are the Republicans; on the Extreme Left the Socialists, the *blocquards*. Observe, I pray you, the force and intelligence of their appearance. Their coats are rude; they are indifferent in matters of costume; in a stroke of the eye they may be distinguished from those of the Right—those are the Nationalists, the Royalists, etcetera. Their coats, you will see, are confectioned by a good tailor, their hairs are well brushed. But these here are to the others as the tame dog of the salon to the free dog of the chase."

"For me, Monsieur," Mémé struck in with chilling dignity, "that the hairs be not well

brushed, the hands not well cleaned, I see not how that makes a good patriot."

"Thousand pardons, Madame," laughed the young man. "In verity it is not that I would say. I have badly explained myself."

"He is an Anarchist, I am convinced of it," whispered Mémé. "My dear Betty, we shall be blown up in our beds if you encourage to speak further this unhappy one."

"In that case we must try and propitiate him," I answered, and turning again to the dangerous youth I inquired the political opinions of those deputies in the Centre.

"*Ma foi*," he replied, "one has here all the varieties. The Left and the Right, these in the Centre have them equally in horror for the most part. Here, for example, are the Milinistes and the Modérés, on this side the Progressives, on that side the Royalists, etcetera, impossible to enumerate them all, but none are precisely of accord the one with the other. Ah, there is Monsieur the Secretary of the Presidence who arrives!"

I followed the stately figure of my unknown benefactor and patron with keen interest, as he mounted high to his place at the bureau behind the chair of the President.

The deputies were pouring in fast now, and

a good deal of hand-shaking went on where Englishmen would only have nodded to one another. Every one was talking at once. The President rang his big bell, but they seemed to take it as a signal to stimulate conversation. The President gave it up at last, and proceeded to read over some papers rapidly and without any attempt to raise his voice above the din.

"He reads the order of the day and repeats the order of the past *séance*," said our friend at the back.

After this the President rose and called out in a ringing voice, "*La parole est à Monsieur Georges* ——" The surname was lost on the encouraging claps from the benches of the Right as one of their number rose and nimbly ascended the tribune, a sort of raised daïs or loose box enclosed by a railing, just below the President's chair. It has the advantage of giving the speaker a commanding view of the house, together with the power of pacing up and down at will, often a most necessary outlet to his feelings.

Before the speaker could open his lips, however, there was a roar from the assembly, a hungry, threatening roar from the Entire Left and Centre, resembling that of lions before feeding-time. The bell rang energetically, the

roar subsided, then rose again more stormily than before.

And all the while the occupant of the loose box tramped up and down, clenched his fists, and opened wide his mouth, though not a sound could be caught by our straining ears.

I turned to my friend at the back, who was adding to the din with hands, feet, and lungs, but he shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows with an expression of perplexity. "Know not yet," he laughed. "Ha!" he cried a moment later, as some audible word gave him a lead, "it is the affair Dreyfus very surely. This one he would prevent the revision. The Republicans will that the affair be revived, the Nationalists will that it rests."

After a few minutes more of deafening clamour, hootings, and *hurlements* from Left to Right and Right to Left, the discomfited speaker descended from the tribune and retired to his seat.

"That is well," remarked our Socialist friend. "One permits him not to be heard—the voice of our party, or rather of France, is this time too strong."

At the back of our box a fierce discussion had started in undertones. The affair Dreyfus needs but a puff to blow it into a blaze again.

Mémé is one of those in the difficult position of abhorring the partisans of Dreyfus, the Socialists, Freemasons, Jews, and all those who war against her beloved Army and Church, yet feeling in her heart a deep conviction of the absolute innocence of the unfortunate Dreyfus.

She usually sums up the case, if forced to discuss it, with, "If he is truly patriot, then he should certainly abide now by the decision of Rennes. Rather should he acknowledge himself guilty than plunge again his country in all these miseries."

A high standard of patriotism to expect from one whom she and the majority of her class regard as an alien. But dear Mémé never could be anything so dull as consistent!

The next speaker, a tall lank figure with face and manners of inexpressible melancholy, read out some extracts from the *Figaro* and *Gil Blas* which were listened to with the profoundest attention and in absolute silence. As he concluded, our friend at the back expressed great satisfaction. This he told us would be a discussion strongly interesting. It concerned some revelations and scandals appearing in the *Figaro* and *Gil Blas*, which attached themselves to the names of prominent personages in the Government.

The melancholy one was quickly succeeded by another speaker who rose from the front bench and was greeted with enthusiasm by the Left. He began by thanking the assembly for giving him this opportunity to answer and deny the monstrous calumnies of which he was accused. At this point he was interrupted, and the attention of the house diverted, by an elderly gentleman, also from the ministerial bench, bounding with surprising agility up the gangway, placing himself before a quiet, retiring-looking individual in one of the upper seats of the Right, and shaking his fist within an inch of the other one's nose. It is believed this action was accompanied by a question, but no one heard it. Apparently he got little satisfaction, for he presently descended to his bench muttering to himself in a way indicating that the answer, though quiet, had not turned away wrath, but rather been of that baffling kind which makes it simmer. No one knew what it was all about, and to the speaker in the loose box, with his discourse awaiting delivery on the very tip of his tongue, the applause which greeted the incident appeared to be exceedingly trying.

It was only towards the close of the *séance* we learnt from the elderly gentleman himself that "it was under the stroke of a legitimate

emotion, namely, paternal affection," that he had, as he expressed it, "demonstrated vivacity!" It was such a delightfully human touch, this sudden transformation of the reserved and dignified cabinet minister into the infuriated father, that I found myself joining heartily with his partisans of the Left, in applauding his explanation.

As to the rights and wrongs of this particular question, or any other raised that day, I am wholly unable to form an opinion. The speaker who had been so abruptly interrupted by one of his own party made us a very earnest and impressive discourse. It lasted a good forty minutes, during which time Mémé slept peacefully and profoundly. The want of ventilation was greatly responsible no doubt, for there are no windows, and not a vestige of any opening to be seen in the double skylight overhead. The speaker was listened to with grave attention. Every one appeared interested, though in this repudiation of the charge made against him he gave us a great deal of personal biography such as would have met with a very different reception, I fear, had John Bull sat as audience. He told us that after twenty years in that Chamber he had arrived at this situation—he possessed not one "valliant halfpenny," and if to-morrow

he was struck by malady, he would be obliged to address himself to the affection of his own. Again, if he had desired, as his calumniators accused, to make fortune with his speech, it was not to the Humberts he would have addressed himself — those there had more the habit of taking money than of giving it! This remark caused hearty laughter all round the house, and we were suddenly knee-deep in *Les Humberts*. As my Socialist friend declared, "it matters nothing where one starts from, soon or late one arrives always at the Humberts. Whether in the theatre, the Chamber, or the church, there you find them, those eternal Humberts!"

Our speaker finished, as he had begun, by emphatically and categorically denying the "calumnies abominable" reported in the *Figaro* and *Gil Blas*. "It is that for us freethinkers," he said, "there are also things sacred, and among those things figure the speeches we pronounce to maintain what we believe the truth!" In conclusion, he appealed not only to his friends but to his enemies, whose admirable sense of justice he had confidence was able to judge him rightly.

His audience did not fail to respond; applause greeted him from both sides, and the tall, melancholy gentleman with the newspaper expressed

himself satisfied and sat down without making any further remark. Mémé, at my side, gave a profound sigh, and observed without opening her eyes that she had not been asleep—let no one imagine it!—she was only closing her eyes for a moment.

It was after this we had the cabinet minister, who was also a father, and on his own showing a somewhat impetuous one. It was a complicated case about a club and baccarat and a sum of money which had been "poured out," and the Right were questioning the methods of the "outpouring," and ancient magistrates and high Parisian functionaries were being dragged into the affair. When the gentleman on the Right, whose nose had been threatened by the "father's" fist, stood up to speak, the entire Left and Extreme Left turned on him a wall of wrathful faces. He, however, spoke but a few quiet, dignified words, declaring himself no accuser, but informing the house he was ready in some more fitting place to appear as a witness.

After this we had one other little diversion, when two deputies came into sudden and violent collision on the steps of the tribune. Some one was knocked down, and the President rang his bell and sang out: "*Le silence, s'il*

vous plait." My friend at the back said there would certainly result a duel, though what it was all about he could not say, only that an insult had certainly been offered. Since Gustave's duel, however, I have not the horror I once had of that form of settling disputes.

Votes were taken by voice, the members holding up their hands first for, and then against, the questions raised. The big urns standing near the tribune are only used when votes are taken on an important measure; they are handed round on those occasions by the *huissiers*, while the deputies remain in their places. The contents of the urns are then sorted by the secretaries and handed up to the President, who proclaims the result.

Though this had not been what is called a *chaude séance*, it had certainly not been lukewarm, and I had "amused myself well," as the *p'tit chou* says, for we were all in deadly earnest and no one was bored. Even Mémé allowed this, and utterly repudiated her peaceful sleep.

In spite of the way I had pestered him with questions, my Socialist friend fervently expressed the hope we might meet again. Mémé was distinctly stand-off and chilly to the young man. "Had he possessed the ideas

more correct, and not shown himself in sympathy with those badly-raised persons of the Left, I should have been more gracious," she excused herself. "For you, *ma chérie*, it makes nothing, but we others we must not encourage those who would drag our poor France to her ruin!"

Curiously enough the young man, while Mémé slept peacefully, had used this very same expression in describing to me the policy of Mémé's friends on the Right.

X

LA FÊTE DES FLEURS

"REMIND thyself always it is the Saturday in eight, the 'Feast of Flowers,' *mon* Jacquot." This was the constant refrain of the *p'tit chou* for ten or twelve days before the event, varied with, "Very surely we go; is it not so, my good little Jacquot? Thou hast promised it—must not forget." As the time drew nearer, not only the days but the hours were carefully counted.

There was no escape, that was clear, even had Uncle Jack desired it. In a rash moment, to compensate his godchild for some passing grievance which had thrown her into a paroxysm of despair, he had with lavish impulse suggested the *Fête des Fleurs*, a decorated carriage to drive in the procession, ammunition of roses, jonquils, &c., for the battle. This was talk worth listening to. The sobs grew less violent, the tears arrested their downward course, and the mournful eyes of the *chou* shone with a new light as she looked

up, eagerly scrutinising her Jacquot's face to gauge the worth of these lightly-spoken words, fraught with such deep import to herself.

Apparently she read what satisfied her, for clambering on to his knee she flung both arms about his neck with a delighted shriek: "Ah, how I love thee, *mon* Jacquot! Thou—thou art good, but for all the rest they are wicked, I love them not."

So the matter had been clenched then and there, and every day when out for her daily promenade in the Champs Elysées with Julie, the Nou-nou, and the *bébé*—"that troup," as she contemptuously designated them—the *chou* insisted on calling round at Avenue Friedland just to remind her Jacquot where that Sunday stood in the calendar, so that he made no error. If Uncle Jack and I were out she would interview Perrette, leaving messages of the "most great importance," to be faithfully delivered the moment he returned.

"It is a spirit strong that child," pronounces Perrette; "she will be one day a woman remarkable. Fear not but she will lead her husband by the nose, never a man will he deceive her, never will he be able to make the follies!" and Perrette sighs, remembering the difficulties of her own married life.

Jacqueline had welcomed the idea of inviting the little Jules, whose mother and step-father were spending a month in Paris. "We shall make a nice little party square," she cried, "and the little Jules he will find that me I am very kind to permit him to come in my carriage—is it not so? We shall have the roses, the roses everywhere—on the horse, on the coachman, on the wheels, on our hats, yes! and one will accord to us the first prize very surely, is it not so, *mon* Jacquot?"

"But yes, but yes, as thou wilt," laughed her god-father, little realising what he was in for with the floral decorator.

As the longed-for Saturday drew daily nearer, the *chou* was seized with continual presentiments that some *malheur* would occur to prevent her living to see this *jour de fête*. And this in spite of the fact that she wore round her neck, day and night, three *porte-bonheurs*—a silver snake, a horse-shoe, and her own first tooth. It was to the latter she attributes her escape, for the presentiment, according to the *chou*, only just failed to fulfil itself on the preceding Wednesday, when we all met at Mémé's for a dinner *en famille*.

We had arrived at the fish stage, when the conversation was interrupted suddenly by a piercing shriek from Jacqueline. Turning our

eyes with one accord, we beheld the *chou* in violent contortions, alternately choking and ramming both tiny fists down her throat. Her father rose quickly and, taking her on his knee, begged she would open wide her mouth and let him look down. But struggling to her feet, she pushed away his hands and continued to shriek and cough spasmodically in the greatest agitation.

"Is it making thee hurt? Where then sufferest thou? Hast thou *une arête* in the throat?" To all of which the *chou* made answer—

"Leave me!"—"Touch me not!"—and continued resolutely fighting with her fish bone alone. Her relations stood round her trembling, waiting, glasses of water and smelling salts in hand, but obeying in that they left her alone.

At last, after a final, supreme convulsion, the *chou* announced, "*Là voilà!*" and held up to the eager gaze of the company the offending *arête*. Then, looking round on us with still streaming eyes and crimson cheeks, she said solemnly:

"*Ma foi*, but it was grave that! Me I escaped to catch an appendicitis! Then me I should be dead instead of assisting at the 'Feast of Flowers.'"

She did not at all appreciate the clap of laughter which greeted this announcement.

"But yes—it is true that—Hélène Girardot, it was she who told it me—the little bones, the pips of grapes, all those machines there, they enter quickly the tube which has no exit, and behold one catches an appendicitis, that which finishes in the agony and the death."

"*Oh-là-là!*" cried Mémé, "what stupidities one recounts to thee there."

"But no—it is true, true," insisted the *chou*. "Hélène she says not the stupidities! She attends the *lycée*, and she is the number five in the class of the philo-lo-lo-gy!" announced the *chou*, with conscious pride in her distinguished friend.

"And what age has she, thy friend Hélène Girardot?" inquired Louis Lefèbre of his daughter.

"Ah, but she is already aged—very aged, my friend Hélène. She has sounded her nine years that one. She has also learnt all how the body is fabricated and that which exists in the interior, though one sees it not. Ten metres of the intestines for each one of us here! folded in a little packet under the sash." The *chou* illustrated the position with both small hands. "That makes for us all," she included each in turn with a nod of her head, "if one counts also Julie and Marthe who serve, nine

times ten metres—ninety metres. My faith, soon one would arrive at a kilometre—not bad that, eh ?"

"She knows much, Hélène Giradot," I agreed.

"Thou also, thou knowest much, too much, Mademoiselle Jacqueline," said her father. "Thy mental arithmetic it makes fear. One doctor in the family, that suffices, but when thou art big I shall place thee on the Bourse to make the affairs. For the moment I desire that Hélène Giradot instructs thee no more in the philo-lo-lo-gy—it is too embarrassing, seest thou ?"

The *chou* regarded him with wide eyes of sorrowful surprise. The corners of her Cupid-bow mouth trembled and drooped ominously.

"Ah, the poor darling," cried her Mémé, embracing her. "But all that she recounts to us, it has much interest and much instruction. And who knows after all the courage which she showed in taking from the throat that wicked *arête* may have avoided some misfortune ?"

"Don't like Papa," declared the *chou*. "It is my Mémé that one which I like. And my good little Jacquot," she added, with her most beguiling smile shot sideways at Uncle Jack ; "he who gives me a carriage of roses for the Fête des Fleurs, since that I am not dead as I had fear,

ah, but horribly fear when I felt the *arête* promenade herself down there."

From that time the *chou* refused all food with bones or stones. She was going to run no further risk of catching *une appendicite*.

Jacqueline and her cavalier, the little Jules, arrived on Sunday morning in time for *déjeûner*. They were supposed to represent a red and a white rose respectively. The *chou* was all rose silk petals, like a small flower maiden out of Mr. Walter Crane's "Feast of Flora." Jules gazed at her with wondering admiration as she danced round him waving her petal skirts and demanding, "Am I not a veritable rose, *hein?* Thou dar'st no longer say that me I am only a little girl, thou!"

Jules, though he had been commanded to appear as a white rose, had no garments which could be made to represent petals except his big collar. There was some justice in the *chou's* crushing remark that he "resembled more to a stick of celery than to a rose."

"At the least," protested poor Jules, "I am white, me. Regard then." And he stood rigidly upright for inspection. His tight little white *piqué* suit, boots, socks, gloves, and hat were in fact spotlessly white. But his *exigeante* mistress detected a flaw.

"*Tiens*, but regard then his legs—they are brown like the table! They are villainous those two legs. It must be that I powder them at once." Without waiting for the consent of the owner of the sunburnt legs, off she flew, returning presently with some powder, which she forthwith proceeded to dab on with unsparing hand, explaining meanwhile: "It is very necessary, seest thou, that which I do. A white rose may not have the legs like thee. It is a great pity thou hast not the legs like me. Mine they are white and pretty, but thine, though they are little, they are ugly by cause of the colour." Then to comfort him she added: "But they are not ugly as were the legs of Papa at Douville. Ah, but those there for all the world I would not have them!"

"But thou can'st not deny it that the white rose has the stalks of brown, even dark brown," remonstrated Jules.

"It is villainous—I will it not," was the *chou's* only reply as she continued her work.

Jules' legs having been settled, the *chou* fixed an enormous white rose in his button-hole. "Now thou art *chic* as we all, me and my cousin Betty and the Uncle Jacquot," she remarked, surveying him with a sigh of satisfaction.

I tried to soften Jacqueline's rigorous treat-

ment by explaining to Jules that this was her own special *fête*, so we were all wearing the costumes she desired. Even Uncle Jack had passed through her drastic hands, and had his nose powdered and a large white rose pinned to his coat, while I was dressed in white and pink, in accordance with the orders of Her Majesty the Rose Queen, as she styled herself.

At half-past two our rose carriage drove up to the door. It was greeted with shrieks of delight by the two watchers on the balcony. The *chou's* order of "*des roses, des roses rouges et blanches partout*" had been faithfully carried out, and the effect was, as we all agreed, altogether ravishing. The carriage represented a rose bower, garlands of red and white roses arching overhead, and a large *corbeille* containing bouquets for the battle placed in front.

It was a day of gorgeous sunshine, and all the world had turned out, if not to join in the battle, at least to see the carriages and watch the *fête*. As we neared the Bois the carriages began to appear on every side. Most of them were decorated, and all had a large basket filled with flowers for the battle. The crowd kept up a continuous murmur of admiration, which broke out occasionally into acclaims as some special work of art passed by.

There was one decorated entirely with branches of cherries and cherry blossom. A favourite actress smiled out between the leaves, and the applause was not only offered to the charming travelling orchard in which the queen of comedians reclined. Another, cool and delicious as a woodland lake, all water-lilies and green leaves, drawn by white ponies, while in the midst sat two fair nymphs in exquisite costumes of green and white. Another carriage was covered with a dome of purple iris and bourganvillea, while a smart buggy found itself transformed into a basket with a giant handle of Parma violets. But the one which excited most the envious admiration of our Red and White Roses was a Chinese *sabot* decked with peonies, and containing some most *chic* little people of the Oriental Legations.

In the Avenue des Acacias the carriages formed into procession, four deep, a double row going each way, and escorted by a crowd of cavaliers on horseback and on foot all along the route. These kept up a brisk hail of roses and carnations on the passing carriages.

As we passed the tribune where sat the judging committee, the *chou* gazed wistfully at the great men. "Ah, if only *le bon Dieu* would grant to touch them the heart that they might

award to our carriage a first prize of honour," she sighed.

"Or even a second prize of honour," added Jules, whose ambition takes less daring flights.

Soon we were in the thick of the battle. Every one laughed and shrieked and flung bouquets to right and left of them. The excitement of Jacqueline and Jules knew no bounds. It was only by unceasing vigilance they were kept from falling under the wheels.

"This resembles to a real battle of soldiers, is it not so, *mon* Jacquot?" inquired the *chou*, breathlessly. "It is also as ferocious, yes?"

"Still more so," assented her Jacquot. "The balls are of flowers instead of iron, *voilà tout*, and they give instead of an explosion of fire one of laughter!"

"Ah, but how that should be amusing, the balls of iron and the fire red, hot, and terrible! *Ma foi*, that should be fine! I should like that well—me! Still better than the flowers."

"Eh, well, and me not," joined in Jules. "Thou art not prudent, thou. With the balls of iron one is killed, and then it is prettily finished with the *fête*."

"Bah!" retorted the *chou*. "Thou art a little wet chicken. Never wilt thou be a brave soldier and a good patriot."

"Me, I will not be a wet chicken, but quite to the contrary—I will be great general, with a sword and a hat of plumes. When I mount on the horse of battle I shall command all the army, and I shall not even perceive me of the little girls like thee in my route." Jules' eyes flashed defiantly. The battle of words was waxing hot. The *chou* took him up fiercely.

"And my papa he says very soon one will have finished with all the generals and the *état-major*. One will chase them all. It will be for our poor France a thing excellent that. They are *farceurs* the generals, says my papa, and he knows all—he makes no error."

How Jules would have taken this total annihilation of all his future hopes of glory we never knew; fortunately a hailstorm of carnations and marguerites diverted our attention. They were showered upon us by Gustave, who had ridden up behind unnoticed with two friends. We fired off all our remaining ammunition, even to sticks and leaves, and were soon again plunged into the thick of the fray.

Uncle Jack entered into the sport as keenly as his godchild. In fact, the only steady and sober members of our party were the horses; they conducted themselves as if the occasion

were the funeral of a President, in no way relying upon the coachman, whom they evidently realised was giving most of his attention to the two alarmingly active occupants of the carriage.

"Jean-Batiste, go thou quickly. Go to the gallop!" or, "Go thou slowly, slowly, Jean-Batiste, we would wait for the carriage of the Chinese ladies." "Stop thou, Jean-Batiste, we must pick up the bouquet which has fallen."

Fierce disputes took place as to who should claim some specially fine trophy.

"Ah, the robber!" cries the *chou* indignantly, as Jules intercepts a tempting bunch of Maréchal Niel roses on its way to my shoulder. "Assuredly that it was designed for my cousin Betty, or perhaps for me, as I am at the side of her—but for thee, no—not. Render the bouquet on the field!"

"All that I catch, me, thou sayest render it to thee. Life with thee it is impossible," declares poor Jules, dashing the roses at her feet. "Thou callest me 'robber,' 'brigand,' if I but touch at an old faded leaf."

The little boys running by the carriage and picking up the fallen bouquets joined keenly in the dispute. "It was for the *grande demoiselle*," they both decided, so we settled that I and

Uncle Jack were to appropriate all the disputed bouquets. This had an excellent effect, and we rarely got anything.

Life with Jacqueline again became not only possible for Jules, but, as usual, highly entertaining. She invented a fascinating pastime, full of peril, called *la pèche*, for which Uncle Jack's walking-stick and my parasol were enlisted as fishing-rods. Jean-Batiste's driving became more than ever eccentric to meet the requirements of the fishers. He declared afterwards he would have preferred an engagement to conduct monkeys at the Hippodrome, but the indulgence and good nature of Frenchmen of all classes, with children, is astonishing.

We passed Henriette de l'Abbadie in an elegant little chariot representing Spring, which formed one of a set of the Four Seasons. By her side was an exquisite specimen of the *jeunesse dorée* whom the world was beginning to designate as "the favourite." Madame de Bretelle sighed over her daughter, and began to doubt the wisdom of having married her to a rich *roué* three times her age.

"That monsieur there he has the air of being the husband of Madame de l'Abbadie instead of the old one she once had," remarked the *chou* in her shrill treble, as they passed on. "All the

mornings he accompanies her in the Bois that one!"

"How dost thou know who accompanies Madame de l'Abbadie, little chatterer?" demanded Uncle Jack.

"Me, I know very well. The morning when we promenade ourselves, me and Julie and Nou-nou and the little one, always we encounter Madame de l'Abbadie and that monsieur there mounting on the horses. And Nou-nou she cries, 'Ah, see her again our *belle amazone* and her *beau cavalier*.' And Julie she says Madame la Comtesse she bores herself with the old husband and takes a young one. But Nou-nou she scolded Julie, and said that child she comprehends all—most not say the scandals! Ah, listen then! One plays the *quêque-vorke*——" broke off the *chou* suddenly, clapping her hands in delight. "That we descend, Jules and me, and dance, yes?" But this being strongly vetoed, she cake-walked in the carriage with what results, may be imagined.

"Me, I adore the *quêque-vorke*," cried the *chou*, as that fatal tune at last wound up. "When I am big I will be the first dancer at the Opera, and all the evenings I will dance the *quêque-vorke*. The Uncle Gustave, he says, that will make a *succès fou!*"

All at once, in the midst of the laughter and gaiety and flower-flinging, we passed a smart, trim victoria, in which a tall, slight woman with pale yellow hair sat stiffly upright and alone, she and her carriage all unscathed by the flower-battle around. Her carriage, her dress, her parasol were pale yellow, just tipped with dark blue, but her face was what arrested my attention. It was like the ghost of dead joy and youth, faded and shrunken in spite of the carmine lips and brilliant dark eyes with the rather too accentuated eyelashes and eyebrows. Not a bouquet was thrown to her, not one did she throw. She was not playing the game with the rest, though her *toilette* and carriage were so smart. Her eyes rested on the laughing, romping children a moment as our carriages stood abreast in the crush, then the thin lips were drawn as if with a twinge of pain, and she turned her head away from us.

Something in her attitude struck a chill to my heart. The afternoon seemed suddenly clouded over. Uncle Jack, who had been employed in rescuing his Panama hat from being used as an ammunition basket, looked round quickly with, "Why, Betty, what is it? You are looking very grave all at once?"

"*Histoire de femme*," I said under my breath,

glancing towards the carriage at our side. The next moment we were driving slowly in opposite directions.

We greeted many friends, among others the gay Marquise de Fleury, that Ninon de l'Enclos of sixty smiling summers. She was ensconced in a bower of flowers, herself dressed all in shimmering clouds of white, shaded by a gigantic rose silk poppy which formed her parasol, and lent the glow and tint of youth to her Hebe-like face. It was just after exchanging a few flying compliments with her that I missed Uncle Jack. Looking back, I caught sight of him as he raised his hat, and laid at the feet of a lady in a yellow carriage a magnificent bouquet of Parma violets. It was the faded lady with the joyless carmine lips. He was back again by my side in a moment.

"What made you do that?" I asked.

"She was once a little girl," he answered gently, his eyes resting on the *p'tit chou*.

This little action reveals Uncle Jack's attitude towards all women. He believes in their inherent fundamental goodness, never mind how their feet may chance to have erred and strayed. The received creeds and views about the sex, starting with poor, much-abused Mother Eve, he simply declines to accept.

This original and unusual attitude on his part

seems to curiously affect every woman with whom he comes in contact, by inspiring her before long with a belief in herself, in her influence, in her power for good, in her own inherent purity and chastity. He sees in all women "once a little girl," and to him the little girl is there still, will be there always. Like M. Maeterlinck, he holds that whatever the past of a woman, however crushed and weighed down her soul may be by degradation and sin, "you have only to whisper one word that has truly come forth from the virgin depths of your own soul, and she will retrace her steps along the mysterious paths of which she has never lost sight. . . . She will respond to you simply, without hesitation, with a word, a look, a gesture, no less pure than your own." Her soul, in fact, comes forth at your call.

Even dear Mémé, with all her boundless faith and inexhaustible power of forgiveness, cannot quite accept this creed of Uncle Jack's, though she finds it an excellent thing he should think well of women, provided only he does not get caught by them. But when I told her of the violets and the painted lady she shook her head.

"He is adorable, the Uncle Jacquot, but, *ma chérie*, that woman never would she comprehend

his action. For her it would mean merely the homage she has exacted always from all the men, and which but now commences to fail her. 'To the old one I still happily appeared to have five-and-twenty,' she would say to herself. No, my Betty, I know the world, alas! and for those ladies there, see you, I find they have already a great deal more than they merit. They are vampires, they are thieves, they it is who suck the life-blood from the happiness of the family. All the romance, all the sentiment, the interest, the sympathy is enlisted for them by our literature and by our stage. Not a piece of the theatre, not a romance where one does not discover one of that kind installed as heroine! No, me I find we have enough of them, and if it should arrive that at last, after a long career of triumph, one of these should suffer a moment of neglect, me I should not counsel to present to her the bouquets of consolation."

At six o'clock began the distribution of prizes. The first prize of honour, an embroidered blue silk banner, was awarded to a gorgeous pagoda decorated with orchids and peacock feathers. As the carriages passed before the tribune now one and now another was bidden to draw up. And oh, the proud moment for the happy occupant as the Presi-

dent of the *fête*, followed by his *état major*, gallantly descends, and with a low bow presents the banner of a prize of honour. The carriage passes on accompanied by the cheers and acclaims of an admiring crowd.

In spite of the fervent prayer of the *p'tit chou*, *le bon Dieu* did not see fit to touch the heart of the judges, though one of them certainly smiled on the two children as we passed near him.

The disappointment, however, at not being among those chosen for this "honour supreme," as Jules called it, was happily entirely obliterated by the wild excitement which we all experienced on suddenly seeing our old friend the "Marquis," now blossomed out into all the splendour of Duc de la Tour, accompanied by his radiant Duchesse and a young sister-in-law, drive up in a chariot of flowers which, for exquisite gossamer lightness and brightness, simply baffles description. And when mid a *brouhaha* of enthusiastic applause the smiling little Duchesse received a beautifully embroidered first prize rose silk banner at the hands of the bowing President, we all felt so shining with reflected glory we could no longer worry at not being suns ourselves. After all, we were moons! Neither the Marquis nor his bride happened

to see us at the moment, for there were two carriages between us; that was the only little cloud in our joy, and one which I confidently prophesied was to be dissipated before long. Luckily for me I proved right, and the homeward return of the *chou* was a fitting close to her "day of feast." Suddenly she was caught up absolutely into the seventh heaven, perched on a pinnacle of delight, a canopy of waving ferns arched overhead, in her hand was placed a sceptre, namely, a first prize banner of embroidered rose brocade, and on her shining spun silk curls rested a crown of roses.

Jules gazed up at her, as the former playmate of King Cophetua's bride may have gazed on the dizzy heights of the throne to which his little friend had been lifted. To the credit of the *chou* be it said, she did not forget him in her sudden exaltation, but called on him to "mount" also. But though the invitation was warmly seconded by the "Marquis," as we still call him, and his little Duchesse, Jules shook his head. He preferred the humbler *rôle* of remaining with the Uncle Jacquot and me, he declared. So the *chou* drove in state down the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne and the Champs Elysées, waving high the banner of the first prize of honour perched up aloft among the flowers and ferns of the

most chic carriage of the *Fête des Fleurs*—a never-to-be-forgotten experience!

"So thou didst forsake thy poor old Jacquot, little *coquine!*" said Uncle Jack, when the triumphant one descended at last at Avenue Friedland, where we had already arrived.

"Ah, *mon* Jacquot, if thou knewest, thou, how it felt good to be a Queen," replied his godchild, clasping him round the neck. "Decidedly me, when I am big I will be always, always Queen!"

XI

MONSIEUR LE CURÉ

THE first time I saw *monsieur le curé*—"our *monsieur le curé*," as the little *chou* and I now call him—he came, like a Lohengrin, to the rescue of distressed womanhood. No beautiful Princess in this case, but, the more credit to his chivalry, a prosaic, middle-aged lady, a foreigner in a strange land, and in that most deplorable of plights, at loggerheads with tyrannous, enraged officialdom—omnibus officialdom.

Mémé and I having duly fulfilled all the requirements of red-tapism, taken numbers at the omnibus bureau, handed our correspondences to the severely important collector, were meekly proceeding to obey the command to mount, when the voice of monsieur the collector, raised in an access of sudden fury, made us start and turn with that quickly aroused sense of guilt, to which those of blameless conduct are specially liable.

"How then? What is this? Yet another

time that one would rob us—Ah, but no, sapristi!" shouted the enraged official, as he clutched an astonished passenger and raised aloft an omnibus ticket as proof of her guilt. The poor lady, German by the speech of her, in vain endeavoured to arrive at the cause of her offence. Her halting French collapsed into German and filled the measure of her guilt.

It was at this moment *monsieur le curé* advanced to her relief. Like magic he stilled the storm, soothed the collector, calmed the conductor, allayed the fears of the bewildered lady, and cleared her character of every spot and stain, in the eyes, not only of the suspicious officials, but of a vast and interested assembly. The correspondence ticket was a correct one surely, for had she not taken all the precautions to-day, in order to avoid repeating the harrowing experience of yesterday when, in her ignorance, she had presented an omnibus correspondence in ascending a tramway not in connection *Lieber Himmel!* in her own Fatherland one could not have abused her more violently for the error! Why, then, did the Herr Conductor declare to-day the ticket availed not, and she must again pay?

"Why, alas? Because," explained *monsieur*

le curé, "the hour had elapsed in which it was permitted to present it."

Not knowing she must take a number, she had been pushed aside while three crowded omnibuses came and went.

"Mount, mount!" yelled the conductor. "One cannot remain all day to discuss the affair of this miserable correspondence."

"But no, this is not the Chamber of Deputies," cried a wag on the top; "Dame, it is a serious omnibus this!"

The clerical knight-errant assisted the agitated lady to mount, meanwhile, quietly and briefly explaining to her the omnibus system of Paris and the thousand pitfalls which await the unwary, a penalty in return for the advantage of this very superior means of cheap locomotion over anything in England or elsewhere on the Continent.

Having accomplished his task, the priest sank back in his corner, wrapping himself round in a dignified, unapproachable retirement. When the conductor came round to collect the fares, I noticed he gave back two sous to the man from his change. The *merci monsieur* could not have been pronounced with deeper respect had the donation been two francs.

Presently *monsieur le curé* took out a small,

well-worn *brevière* and read absorbedly, his lips moving as though half audibly. Evidently he was repeating his service, one of the rules of the Church being that the priest shall read the service wherever he happens to be, moving his lips to form each word.

I found myself watching him intently, studying the keen, ascetic face, refined, well-chiselled mouth and finely-shaped head, with the freedom of constraint one would gaze at a picture or statue. Surely I knew the face and the character it expressed. Yes, it was Saint Francis—my beloved Saint François d'Assise, as painted by Giotto. I was recalled abruptly from my meditations and speculations by the picture suddenly raising his eyes to mine and taking a steadfast look into the inmost recesses of my soul, so it seemed to me. But the look was so kindly, so wise, I felt no uneasiness or resentment, but rather the sudden recognition of a friend. It was only momentary—one of those long moments in which so much has time to happen—and he was gone, absorbed again in his book, leaving me with the wish that he would look up once more and give me a chance of reading his soul.

But *monsieur le curé* did not lift his eyes from his book again, though, when a regiment of soldiers marched by with their officer he raised

his hat, and again, as we passed a funeral, crossed himself devoutly and remained uncovered till it had gone by, showing that, even with his eyes on his psalter, a priest who is priest indeed, sees everything around him which is of human interest. I made no doubt that his inner vision was just as highly developed, and that he could have given counsel, comfort, or reproof, as each case needed, to every one of us in that omnibus, before he had been there ten minutes or we had spoken a word in confession.

But Mémé, to whom as we walked home I propounded this idea, resented it strongly.

"Well, I hope I have nothing very bad to hide," she protested; "but for me I like not that a man, not even a priest, though I trust I am good Catholic, should regard me in the soul, in the heart, unless myself should grant the permission. For this priest I find it in bad taste that he should permit himself to read you in the soul as you say—above all in an omnibus. And for you, my *chérie*, it was a great indiscretion to have looked so much in his direction. All Frenchmen are alike, priest or no priest! If you had been alone that man would without doubt have been capable of following you and addressing you."

"You think so? I wish he had," I answered, to Mémé's dismay. "I was longing to talk to

him, for, do you know, I believe he is no other than my beloved Saint François d'Assise come back again to earth."

"But this one? He was of a ripe age, is it not so?" inquired Mémé sharply.

I reassured her. "Alas, yes, for I cannot bear to think of his having been born perhaps sixty years before I met him, and now I have met him but to lose sight of him again."

"Those ideas Buddhistic of reincarnation appear to me to possess tendencies very dangerous. *Mon enfant,*" and Mémé's tone became one of solemn warning, "I joke not when I predict for you complications the most grave if you permit yourself to indulge them. However, it rejoices me to hear he had the air of sixty years, perhaps he is seventy, and in all the cases you will not see him again," concluded Mémé, with a sigh of relief.

But to see my Saint Francis again became from this time my great wish, and I had, moreover, an odd conviction that I should meet him again. It was merely a case of waiting, and life has taught me the necessity of waiting, though never, alas! how to do so with patience.

The next day, calling on my friend Marie de Vigny, she spoke of a book she had been reading with deep interest, a new life of

Saint François d'Assise. Had I heard of it? Curiously enough I had noticed a review of this "Life" in the *Nouvelle Revue* contrasting it with that by Monsieur Paul Sabatier, and showing how both authors portray the same magnetic, vital personality, though by methods as different as would be portraits of the same man by a Raphael and a Velasquez. Marie, who had long directed my theological reading, was delighted at my interest—I am not always so ready to embark on long lives of the saints—and promised to send me round the book at once.

And as I read and read that "Life" so brimful of life, so human, so divine, at every age and under all circumstances so love-compelling, the face of my Lohengrin priest rose up clearly before me.

I saw him as a youth, eager, passionate, impetuous, loving fun and adventure with the lightest hearted, no trace as yet of the lines of sorrow, suffering, and experience to come. Again, in middle life this same face seemed to respond to every word and act recorded of the Saint. Finally, on Mount Verna in the frail old man, wasted by fasting and prayer and work, a very shadow of his former self, yet with the spirit shining ever stronger through the luminous eyes, it was my priest again I saw.

I asked Marie if she knew anything of the author. He was a priest of good birth, she told me, who, unlike most of his class, had elected to be the *curé* of a poor parish instead of a Jesuit, for which his birth and scholarship had so obviously fitted him—more she did not know.

I left Paris that spring much disappointed at not having seen my St. Francis again. Though I had visited I won't say how many churches in Paris, no sign of him had I found. Yet I was convinced he must be well known, and, like his prototype, a great preacher.

I have an unquenchable belief in the old fairy stories of the power of wishing. If only you wish long enough and strong enough, you can make most wishes come true. So for six months I wished hard. The end of October brought a letter from Uncle Jack begging I would go and help him through November, "that most detestable month in the year." So I found myself again crossing the *Sacré Manche*—an hour and twenty mortal minutes passed in such purgatory that I trust they will be reckoned ten thousand years to my credit hereafter, as were those moments of condensed agony undergone by Miss Proctor's "Faithful Soul."

The day after my arrival I was taking *déjeuner*

with the *p'tit chou* and her parents, when a patient was announced, described by the maid as desiring so urgently to see *monsieur le docteur* that, in spite of its being out of consulting hours, Louis Lefebvre directed the lady to be shown into his bureau, and left his *déjeuner* half-finished.

"These sick ones are altogether disgusting," pronounced the *chou*. "The poor Papa they permit him no repose, neither the day nor the night—*Sont des egoistes, des canailles*"—the *chou* was working herself up,—"*des co*——" she stopped, looked at her mother tentatively, and concluding it was safe to go on for once, finished boldly with, "*oui, des cochons!* They merit well *le mot* those there for example."

"Jacqueline, *Fi donc!* I imagined thou hadst ceased to pronounce *le mot* since thou hadst six years," said her mother.

"It is true—me I say no longer *le mot*," replied the *chou*. "I become old and sage—I say now *cochon* only on the great occasions —when it is well merited, seest thou. *Enfin* when *le bon Dieu* himself he would say it!"

"*Tais-toi*, Jacqueline. Thou chatterest too much. *Le bon Dieu* never would he say *le mot*."

"How! never would he say it?" cried the *chou* triumphantly. "Ah, but here is what is droll, then! *Le bon Dieu*, He it was who

fabricated them, the pigs, is it not so? He gave them their names also; without that, who would know what they were, those animals there? How then can one say, never *le bon Dieu* has said the word? *Eh ben?*—say then, *ma c'sine?*" She turned on me, her eyes alight with mischief.

My involuntary laugh, as her mother groaned, "That child becomes truly insupportable," confessed her victor. For though I had not been foolish enough to launch myself in an argument, by any rash assertions concerning *le bon Dieu*, she knew I felt bound to support her mother, and we stood or fell—generally fell—together.

Thérèse was saved from further discomfiture by the reappearance of her husband. He reported an interview with one Madame Bonvalet, "an original"—"a character."

"It appears," he said, "she holds the position of *bonne, gouvernante, garde-malade*, mother, sister, daughter, banker, all the relations in one, to *monsieur le curé* of Notre Dame de Consolation, a large and very poor parish. She desired to consult me, having heard from a friend, whose son I had cured of a fractured leg, that *monsieur le docteur* made miracles for the poor as well as the rich. I inquired what was her malady. 'Our malady,' she answered, 'is that *monsieur le*

curé becomes blind!' In the commencement it appears he disguised it from her, but now since three months he becomes always worse. He ceases to read, it is with difficulty he can write, yet he refuses to care for himself, saying always he needs his money—'our money,' she called it—for the poor. She conducted him to the hospital—they did him no good—'imbeciles those there,' says our Bonvalet. 'A bottle of lotion by which the eyes became rather worse than better—*Voilà tout!* She gave three candles to 'Notre Dame des Douleurs.' Alas, she has made no attention unless, indeed, it was she who put the poor Bonvalet the idea in the head to consult me—by the result one must judge! But before *monsieur le curé* consults me she desires to know what one must pay for the cure of blindness. The sum of fifty francs is the most that she begs I will announce to *monsieur le curé*, for never will he consent to expend more. But to her I must speak with frankness, and we are to arrange the affair together in secret. She possesses a fortune, her wages since thirty years, which she has guarded, awaiting the time when *monsieur le curé* should need them. It appears that the *curé* gives to his poor all he possesses, his food, his shoes, his clothes, even on occasions his bed. Happily, his *soutane* is unsuitable for a

beggar or never would he possess one. The fifty francs is a tenth of some money the editors have given him for his celebrated book on Saint François d'Assise—that tenth he permits himself in order to retain if possible his sight."

"His celebrated book on Saint François? Is his name Monsieur l'Abbé de Langremont?" I asked breathlessly.

"I think in effect that resembles the name," answered Louis Lefèbvre. "You have heard of the book, then? I thought the old one was giving her judgment when she called it celebrated."

Apart from their purely human interest as patients, Louis Lefèbvre has small sympathy with priests as such, and none whatever with "lives" of the saints, though, as I tell him when I want to rouse his ire, his own life will one day furnish ample material, he is so devoted to his poor patients. He protested, but Thérèse and I insisted on being introduced to *monsieur le curé* and his devoted *gouvernante* as soon as their consultation should be over, Madame Bonvalet having got the doctor to agree to act as his accomplice if he found the case of *monsieur le curé* one he could reasonably hope to cure. "The poor old one," he said. "I hope I shall

succeed, for not only my reputation is in the balance, but that also of the blessed Virgin who accepted those three candles."

The appearance of *monsieur le curé* was heralded afar by the animated voice of Madame Bonvalet:

"Have a care, Monsieur, behold a step. This is the door by here—it is the passage which is black—difficult, therefore, for any one to see. Me I have the eyes of a cat."

The door opened, and there stood—my Saint François! So he was the author and also the *curé* dwelling among his poor, giving them all he possessed. And was this not just what Saint François d'Assise, living in these days, would be! And his faithful friend, his Santa Chiara, what better would she desire than to return to earth as Madame Bonvalet to watch over and serve him all her days?

"Allow me to present to you my wife, Monsieur, and a young English lady, our friend. They desire greatly the honour of your acquaintance," announced Louis Lefèbvre.

I looked anxiously at his eyes, those eyes which had seen, with so kindly and wise a look, into my soul. That their light should become darkened seemed like losing the beneficent sun. I was thankful to see outwardly no change as

he took my hand and bent that earnest look on me once more.

"The nerves fatigued by too much work at night with an insufficient light," pronounced the doctor. An admirable new invention, an apparatus for massaging the eye, joined to perfect repose for a short time, would restore a naturally strong sight.

Happy tears stood in the eyes of the faithful Bonvalet as she repeated to me this good news, adding: "It is our blessed Lady I recognise now who has guided me the feet to *monsieur le docteur*. Never will I doubt her more. The Sunday next I will hang in her chapel a heart of real silver as offering."

Then we all talked of the book, or rather of Saint Francis, for *monsieur le curé* persistently steered the conversation away from his own work. I had been to Assisi, and had some leaves from the sacred rose-tree pressed between the pages of my *Fioretti*—an immediate bond between us.

He spoke of the Saint as of a well-beloved master and friend by whose side he had journeyed half a lifetime, into whose heart he had seen, on whose bosom he had leant.

"In my church," he said, "I have a Chapel of Saint François, and in it many of his sacred

relics. There is a miracle picture also above the altar, and the offerings of those whose petitions have been granted fill the chapel. Even little children have brought their treasures as thank-offering. Would it make Mademoiselle pleasure to visit my church?" he asked.

I replied that nothing would make me greater pleasure, and we fixed an early date when Thérèse and I would come.

"Me also, I desire to see the church of *monsieur le curé*," cried the voice of the *chou* suddenly. She had crept in unnoticed, and entrenched behind my chair was listening to all.

"*Mais non*, Jacqueline," said her mother nervously. "Say *bon jour* then to Monsieur. Thou art not enough well conducted to go to church —remind thyself only of the last time."

"But the last time I bored myself much. The big man of the nose red, but red, and the hat of gold, he took from me my piece of two sous and rendered it not, though I cried to split him the ears. At the church of *monsieur le curé* I shall amuse myself well."

In spite of this confession, perhaps by reason of it, Saint Francis drew the *chou* towards him, saying gently:

"Yes, my little one, thou also, thou shalt come. 'Let the little ones come unto Me, and

forbid them not.' It was the dear Lord Jesus himself who said it."

The *chou* regarded her mother triumphantly. "Thou hearest, *monsieur le curé*, the little Jésus and me, we are all of the same advice!"

The eyes of Saint Francis twinkled like those of a schoolboy.

"That is admirable!" he cried. "We three we will be always of the same advice—is it not so? Go now, little one, and ask the permission of thy dear good *maman* that thou comest to the beautiful house of *le bon Dieu*."

To the surprise of her mother and me the *chou* obeyed like a lamb, making her request in the voice of a cooing dove. And from that hour she has listened to *monsieur le curé*, as the wild birds listened to, and obeyed, that first Saint Francis.

After this, of course there was no help for it, we were bound to take the *chou* whether we liked it or no. The church of Our Lady of Consolation is a long way from everywhere. Like an ancient rock, strong and enduring, it rises and towers above the vast network of narrow, dirty, crowded streets which surround it.

"Our Lady stands always in our midst," says *monsieur le curé*. "Her heart, her arms

are open to receive her children day and night."

For the doors of this church are never closed. Lamps burn always before the altar, and prayer never ceases to ascend throughout the night watches. One after the other they take it up, and, like the light, it is never extinguished. A silent, solitary figure with bowed head may be always seen kneeling before the altar.

When we arrived, a funeral service was still going on—the funeral of a little child. The *chou* was in one of her most inquiring moods, and the fact of the funeral being that of a child thrilled her with intense interest, and appealed to her dramatic sense, at all times very strong. As the procession of little children passed up the nave, bearing in their hands white flowers and wreaths, she pulled my sleeve and demanded in a shrill treble :

"Say then, *ma c'sine*, those children there are they also the interment?"

I answered they were the little friends who made the procession.

"And they also, those little friends, will one give them a fine coffin and a monument?" she asked.

I shook my head, but no reluctance on my part could stem the torrent of questions about

that child who was playing to the *chou* so enviable a *rôle* as centre figure.

Did she find herself well there the little girl in the handsome coffin covered with flowers? Who had made her to be a dead one? Had she died because one had caused her to be afraid at night, like the canary, or from eating some poison, like the poor dog Mouton? In the heaven where she was now, did *le bon Dieu* give to her as many *galettes* as she would have? And so on and so on. The *tais-toi* of Thérèse fell on deaf ears, and I found it better to answer than have the same question repeated indefatigably and each time in a higher key.

At last all knelt, and there was a silent hush throughout the church. "*Ma c'sine*," came in a penetrating whisper, "say, then, what are they doing?"

"Sch—— they say their prayers," I answered.

"How? They say their prayers, those children, when they have not undressed themselves! It is Julie who would be angry if she saw that," cried the *chou* indignantly. And then followed Julie's views about people who said their prayers otherwise arrayed than in their robes of night!

Thérèse and I felt thankful when that funeral service was concluded.

The *chou* had brought with her a mysterious parcel, which she told us she was going to hang in the chapel of Monsieur Saint François.

"It is a grand, grand secret," was all the information she would vouchsafe.

The funeral over, we went round to the small vestry of *monsieur le curé*. He begged us to await him still a little quarter of an hour, as he had yet one more duty to fulfil, two of his children waiting to be confessed, after that he was at our service.

"Me also, I should like well to be confessed," remarked the *chou*, as she saw the first of the "children," an ancient dame with a face like a map of Switzerland, take up her position at the mysterious little door of the confessional.

"Are quite charming those little houses there," she cried with enthusiasm.

At last *monsieur le curé* was free. "We will begin with the chapel of Saint François," he said; "our saint"—he smiled at me.

"Me also," said the *chou*, inserting herself between the *curé* and me, and slipping her small hand into his with an air of possession.

"Thou also," he smiled. "And thy packet, what does it contain?" he inquired.

"Sch—— it is the secret," said the *chou*. "Me, I would give also my treasure as the other

little children. When we arrive at the chapel of Monsieur Saint François I will take off the paper, and *monsieur le curé* he will put it on the wall so that all the world shall see, yes—is it not so?"

"But yes, my little one—the dear saint he will rejoice in thy gift without doubt," the *curé* assured her. "To give thy treasure that is what makes pleasure to the *bon Dieu*."

"I feel a horrible misgiving," whispered Thérèse. "What can there be in the packet of Jacqueline!"

It was very carefully done up in a dozen wraps at least; but at last there emerged, in all its barbaric hideousness, the last new treasure, the heart's idol of the *chou*, Uncle Jack's present of a grinning, hairy "Gollywog."

"*Voilà* is he beautiful? Is he magnificent? Monsieur Saint François will be content, yes? He will love me well, is it not so?—more than all the other children—yes?"

For a moment a look of consternation came over the expressive face of *monsieur le curé*—I think he was afraid it was alive. Then he took the "Gollywog" carefully in his hands. "He is magnificent, my child—but yes, he is truly original that one."

Thérèse would have interfered, but I begged

her to wait and see how Saint Francis would arrange the affair.

"Put him on the wall—say to Monsieur Saint François it is the little Jacqueline who gives to him the beautiful Golivogue," cried the *chou* eagerly.

"See," said *monsieur le curé*, "we lay thy treasure here on the altar step. Now we will kneel, thou and I, and ask *le bon Dieu* to tell us in the heart what he would have us do with thy gift."

They knelt together, *monsieur le curé* and the *chou*. Presently *monsieur le curé* rose. "*Le bon Dieu* has told me what the Saint François would have us do," he said. "Thy gift is accepted, my little one—oh yes, it makes much joy to the saint. There dwells near here a little girl quite lame and ill—never can she leave her bed, the little Jeanne. She has no toys, not one. Thou shalt give to her this fine," he hesitated, "person. To make rejoice the poor little ones, that, my child, rejoices Saint François."

Tears gathered slowly in the eyes of the *chou*. This was not the fate she had dreamed for her beloved "Golivogue," but she answered bravely: "Take him! but say to the little Jeanne that she care for him well—that she give him to eat all the days—without that I retake him."

"I discern qualities in that little one," *monsieur le curé* observed to me, "which would make of her a great saint."

I began to think so too, if they could be developed by a training at the *presbytère* of Our Lady of Consolation.

The church was full of treasures, real art treasures, the gift of *monsieur le curé*. The frescoes in the chapel of Saint François were excellent copies of those by Giotto at Assisi. There was an old Spanish crucifix in crystal and silver, an altar cloth of Italian embroidery of the *cinque cento*.

Over the great altar hung a fine Nativity by Ghirlandajo, an heirloom in the family of *monsieur le curé*. The pulpit and choir stalls were of old oak quaintly carved, and the light came mellowed and subdued through some old stained glass of great beauty.

"There are some persons," said *monsieur le curé*, "who make me the reproach that I have here so many things of value when my poor, besides being ignorant of things artistic, lack the bread and the clothes. My answer it is this —I would care not only for the bodies and the souls of my poor, but for their intelligence also. All three are at present interlaced, each one assists the other to grow, to develop. So I give

to my poor one place where they too shall possess the beautiful music, the beautiful paintings and sculpture, where their eyes and ears weary with the sights, the sounds of poverty, suffering and sin, shall obtain refreshment, and their hearts be filled with the sense of the beauty of God. For all the true art reveals something of the beauty of God, is it not so?

"Behold my defence. Here is our *chez-nous*. On all occasions we enter here, when we mourn, when we rejoice—every event of our life on this earth we commemorate it here!"

Next to the church stands the *presbytère* where *monsieur le curé* and his two *vicaires* dwell in severest simplicity, attended on by Madame Bonvalet and a widow whose discreet years and singularly plain features pointed her out as the regulation *bonne* for the priest's house.

Monsieur le curé invited us to enter and partake of some refreshment; it would make great pleasure to the great Bonvalet, he assured us.

In her neat black apron and old-fashioned, white *bonnet* she was standing at the door looking out for us.

Everything inside the austere little house was spotlessly clean, the plain wooden tables and chairs spoke of vigorous daily scrubbings. "I

expect more soap than meat is consumed in this menage," remarked Thérèse aside.

While the *chou* and her mother partook of *sirop* and wafer biscuits, I made a tour of the little house with Madame Bonvalet, and drew out her reminiscences of *monsieur le curé*—no hard task when once she found a good listener.

"Already as a child he was saint. He had also the beauty of an angel, the little one! And the ideas of an originality! Oh, but never can you imagine to yourself the ideas that jumped in the head of that child! Yes, mademoiselle, me, I have known *monsieur le curé* all my life. I entered the service of madame, his mother, see you, when I had but sixteen years and *monsieur le curé* he had but seven years. Me, I was like all the young girls—the head full of folly. My cousin, who was in the house of a *modiste* in Paris, had counselled me if I would make myself beautiful on the *fête* days when I went out all be-Sundied (*endimanchée*) to put on the cheeks some white powder, on the lips some red ointment. I admired greatly my cousin. Alas, the unhappy one she turned badly—and it was only because of *monsieur le curé* that me, I did not take that same road. One Sunday, as I dressed myself in my best toilette and rubbed my face of little fool with

the powders, the little one to whom I made no attention as he amused himself in the room, approached me with a regard severe.

"Why dost thou put the powders on the face, Lucie?" he demanded of me. "It is dirty that stuff on the face."

I felt myself ashamed before this child's gaze, but I answered, "It makes nothing—no one perceives it, and the red lips are pretty, seest thou?"

"Then it is a lie that thou sayest with that wicked powder there, take it off! Wash thou the face, and say not a lie to all the world, or never more can I love thee," said the child, with a look in the same moment *triste* and severe.

That voice of the child was to me as the voice of God—I could not resist it. I washed me the face, and never from that day had I the courage to be *coquette*. If I would put me a ribbon in the hat, the conscience reproached me with vanity. Yet, the little one he was not too serious. Often he sang all day, and was full of joy and vivacity as a little bird. But always the tears came quickly to the eyes at sight of one in sorrow or pain, and at once he desired to give them all he possessed. There was one time, I remind myself, when he presented to a mendicant child his little costume of blue velvet, quite new and beautiful, with a large

collar, and the cuffs of lace, but fine—Madame herself she had worked them. He resembled in verity a little prince dressed in that costume. The child who begged entered the garden, while *monsieur le curé* played there alone. Oh, how she, poor madame, she angered herself when we discovered what he had done. 'But why, then, didst thou give that costume there?' she demanded; 'the one more old it would have served much better.' And the little one he replied, 'But it was thou, my mother, who told me the good God has said, "Give never that which costs thee nothing; Give always of thy best, that which costs thee dear."' When he said this, with the tears in the eyes and the heart all swollen, Madame found no more the courage to scold him."

"But he resembles altogether Saint François d'Assise. He *is* Saint François!" I cried. And Madame Bonvalet, instead of looking as if she thought me crazy, assented with delight.

"Mademoiselle she says truly. Behold precisely what me I find also, and I have much studied that saint there. Also *monsieur le curé* he had the habit of reading to me his chapters of the celebrated book he made—not until I well understood what he had written did he find himself satisfied. That book *monsieur le curé*

has made me the touching honour to dedicate it to me, his old *bonue*—'our book' he calls it. Ah, in all the world is there no one who resembles my *monsieur le curé*. Mademoiselle must not let monsieur know I have chattered these things, or he would scold me well," she cautioned me as we returned to the refectory.

I found the *p'tit chou* listening with wide eyes and parted lips as *monsieur le curé* told thrilling tales of the little ones of his parish. There was a bread-winner of seven years who supported an invalid mother ; and a small mother of nine, who cooked and washed for her five lesser brethren ; to say nothing of the little Jeanne, who became quite a heroine, when we heard how she had been thrown out of a burning house three years ago, and never been able to leave her bed since. Before we said good-bye, it was settled that the *chou* and I were to go and visit that little Jeanne, and teach her to knit and make gorgeous garments of wool, both for herself and the "Golly-wog"—warm, but of a warmth to make envy all the people in that street when the cold winter should arrive.

Jacqueline's conversion is certainly going on apace under the magnetic influence of *monsieur le curé* and *monsieur* Saint François, who are in her mind, as in mine, identified as the same

person, but the old *chou* still sprouts up irrepressible at times. As, for instance, the other night, when Thérèse, murmuring a fond *bon soir* to the sleeping baby, and addressing her as *mon amour, mon trésor,* was suddenly startled by a voice from the adjoining crib:

"If it is thy treasure that one, thou should'st then give her to *monsieur* Saint François to hang up in the little chapel. That will make much pleasure to *le bon Dieu.*"

XII

TWO BETROTHALS

BEFORE taking leave of my French Friends I must give the latest news of two whose *fiançailles* have just come off, and both of whom are kind enough to attribute their happiness to my admirable advice—Gustave and M. de Sérignan.

For Gustave is affianced. With tears and smiles like an April day Mémé came over to Avenue Friedland, the telegram in hand, which announced the long impending event as a *fait accompli.*

The telegram came from St. Petersburgh, for the fair *fiancée* is a Russian, twenty-three years old, the only child of a wealthy merchant of highly respected family. The *dot* is all that could be desired and a good deal more than was ever originally sought, but after all, "since it is there, one would not wish it away," as Mémé practically observes. The young girl, Mademoiselle Vera Patrowski, is described on reliable authority as of a beauty angelic, eyes

blue as the myosotis, hair and complexion of that attractive shade known as *tient mal*, figure supple and *elancée* as a birch-tree. Besides this she is accomplished and full of talent; speaks four languages with fluency, plays the piano with brilliancy, paints with refinement and skill. She is of a disposition docile without feebleness, religious yet neither bigot nor *dévote*. A devoted father and an aunt indulgent yet firm (her mother being dead) have brought her up in the way she should go, and she has gone.

The telegram was followed by letters from Gustave, Monsieur Patrowski, and the young *fiancée* herself.

The letter of Vera gave Mémé great satisfaction. Every phrase breathed appreciation of Gustave, and showed besides a very charming and touching affection already formed for the unknown mother of her *fiancé*. "Will you confide to me your son?" she asked, "and I will promise that never shall you regret your goodness. To make his happiness shall be the sole object of my life, and I will be for you a daughter devoted, respectful, and affectionate." But the sentence which caused Mémé most joy was the naïve hope with which Vera concluded, that she might have many children to make the happiness and pride of her mother-in-law.

"That sentiment indicates that she is not only good Catholic, but also knows nothing of these ideas 'new game,'" remarked Mémé thankfully. "The young women now, they desire only the unique child, that which is perhaps reasonable when the *dot* and the *rentes* are no great thing; but, with a good *dot*, I prefer much to find in the young wife the point of view of our Vera."

"She would have made an excellent Christian martyr, your little Vera," I answered; and taking up one of her photographs, I pointed out as a fact a curious likeness to the famous picture by Delaroche of the Virgin Martyr floating on the sea.

It is Madame de Bretelle who takes to herself the chief, if not sole, credit for the making of the marriage of Gustave.

Mémé told her of her desire at last to marry Gustave, and Madame de Bretelle promised her assistance, for, having arranged marriages for all her own young relations of a marriageable age, she was now never averse to helping her friends. "I will lay your wish on the heart," she assured Mémé, and being a lady of energy and resource, Mémé was not surprised when a few weeks later she received a *petit bleu* saying: "Dear friend, I have your affair! Come, dine with me in

little committee to-night, and I will tell you all."

Mémé arrived to the minute, nervously excited, half hoping, if the truth must be told, that her "affair" was not found and never would be found, though urged by her strong sense of maternal duty to do her utmost to bring about the dreaded event.

"It is from my cousin Mme. de Kronschoff, whom you already know, that the proposed marriage arrives," began Mme. de Bretelle. "I wrote to her of your charming boy, knowing her to be in a position unique for arranging marriages the most brilliant and successful. She has an immense acquaintance both in Petersburgh and Paris. If only I had consulted her for my own child—my Henriette! The position of that one is handsome, but the mother she suffers to see her daughter making the flirt as makes my Henriette. There are even moments when I fear she will turn badly. My cousin would have married her to a man more young, but I could not find one with sufficient fortune, *hélas!* Behold the photograph, then, of she who I hope will become your *belle-fille*. She is, as you see, young, pretty, mignonne, seductive—besides that she possesses a pretty *dot, ma chère amie*, of one million! You have luck, and I make

you my compliments that such a *parti* should be presented for your choice."

Mémé had eagerly seized the photograph, and was studying it with deep attention. At the mention of the *dot* she says she was hit as by a stroke of thunderbolt. "Oh, *mon Dieu!*" she cried, "that, see you, dear friend, it is far too much. Never can I arrange to meet such a fortune."

"But wait, wait, my good friend. You have not heard the half of the history. The father of the young girl seeks not a fortune; that which he desires to find it is a young man of good family among the *noblesse*, whether in France or Russia makes nothing to him. He himself is of the class of rich merchants, and will value your pretty little title of seventh Baron d'Aville. Our *bonhomme* demands also that the husband of his daughter possess a perfect health, a life well ranged, and a character solid, well posed—in fine, a good boy who makes no follies, you understand. For him he is willing, in exchange for these qualities, to give his million of francs. A man of good sense that one. Happy if there were more of such in France!"

Mémé inquired about the religion—to her a very important point. "It is well for the wife

to be of the religion of her husband," is her theory, "and for the one and the other to be of the religion of their country."

Mme. de Bretelle explained there would be no difficulty on that score. Mme. de Krouschoff had gone into that matter also with the aunt of the young girl. The latter was quite prepared to join the Church of her husband in the event of marrying a Catholic. Her mother, who had belonged to the Roman, had joined the Greek Church on marrying a Russian. To return to the religion of her mother would make her a sweet pleasure. *Eh, bien?* What say you? Does it sing to you this marriage, my friend?" asked Mme. de Bretelle.

Mémé, torn with conflicting emotions, embraced her friend and thanked her warmly. "The *rôle* of mother it is full of difficulty in these crises of life," she sighed; "but if they please each other, the young people, that is now the sole essential which remains!"

"I would counsel that Gustave start for Petersbourg without delay," said Mme. de Bretelle—and Mémé gasped. Already she felt her son wrenched from her. "The season commences, and the other *prétendants* present themselves on all occasions. The father and aunt of Vera regard favourably all my cousin

has recounted of your son, but until he has presented himself they will decide nothing. The young girl, too, must express herself as content before one accepts him and permits him to make the court. The counsels of my cousin behold them. 'Let your young man,' she writes, 'come immediately to Pétersbourg, engage a handsome *appartement* and an elegant equipage. He should be accompanied also by a valet, discreet and confidential, who will spread everywhere good reports of him. I will arrange for him, even as his own mother, and I guarantee the affair will march at a marvel—The young girl is to him.'"

Mémé looked thoughtful. This little trip meant a large haul from her capital. Madame de Bretelle agreed he must not find it necessary to economise; he must do the thing well, *en grand seigneur*, not with any idea of giving a wrong impression to M. Patrowsky—he already knew Gustave's income to a franc—but to place him in a favourable position for "making his court." Mémé never hesitated; at once she decided to sell out of a good investment and produce the requisite sum.

"This will not be the first fine marriage which my cousin has accomplished," said Madame de Bretelle. "The institution for cripple children

which she inaugurated is supported almost entirely by the marriages she makes. That of the Prince Stephanovitch and Mademoiselle Batoumloff last season added a new wing to the building. For herself she accepts nothing, not a centime, not even a jewel. A bouquet of flowers on the day of the contract, that is all. But for her cripples, her blind, her poor, she accepts what you will—for them she declares herself avaricious. It is a woman of the ideas large my cousin, of the heart generous. Her works of charity are in verity admirable, and it is above all to benefit these that she interests herself in making the marriages. For the rest, she has for that *métier* a singular gift, possessing, as she does, the essentials, the tact, the intuition, and the resource."

Mémé announced her intention of consulting Uncle Jack. Madame de Bretelle shook her head. "He is charming, the dear Monsieur Montimère, and for me, you know I adore him; but his counsels in these matters they are not worth two sous! His ideas they will be always the ideas of the English. Those there leave to *le bon Dieu* to arrange the marriages, while they fold them the hands and do nothing to aid or to guide their children. By consequence, their sons, even chiefs of the family, make the

marriages for themselves with the actresses and the persons unsuitable, while others have a thread on the paw, and give themselves not the trouble to marry at all. As for the daughters, *Dame!* those they have a *triste* lot, with the families English mode of ten and fifteen children, these poor ones receive no *dot*, and in all the cases the marriage is an affair of the chance. Even one has recounted me of the young girls in the provinces marrying themselves with the coachmen and the *valets de pied*, default of better! Yet the English leave not their affairs of the Bourse, of the commerce, to *le bon Dieu*. Ah! but no, behold them there the most diligent and practical among the nations! Consult the Uncle Jack for your affairs if you will, my friend, but not for your marriages."

Mémé, who fights valiantly for the English whenever they are attacked by her own countrymen, vehemently denied these reports, as "foolish and malicious." "One says, doubtless, in England the follies about we other French," she assured her friend; "never must one believe what one reads in the journals." But she promised not to be converted by Uncle Jack to English ideas and the policy of the folded hands.

Uncle Jack's interest in Mémé's great news was as keen as my own. Having listened to the

letter from Madame Kronschoff, he congratulated her heartily. "Let us hope now the young people will do their part and fall in love with each other when they meet," he added, speaking English, as he generally does when alone with Mémé, she replying in either language which comes uppermost.

"But why not?" cried Mémé. "The young Vera is altogether pretty and charming, as one can see. A man could not prevent himself from liking her, and Gustave also he is a pretty boy, and has a personality very attractive, is it not so?" Both Uncle Jack and I hastened to endorse this warmly.

"But still, to fall in love," said Uncle Jack, "that, you know, dear Mémé, is another pair of shoes. Liking and loving, unfortunately, in France have to be expressed by the same word. How you manage it I don't know. I suppose it is the delicate inflection you are able to convey in the voice and a certain subtle change in the expression—but for we elementary Britons it would never work."

"But why then should they not love, these two young people? Call it as you will, to like, to love, it makes nothing," cried Mémé.

"Ah, yes, it does though!" laughed Uncle Jack. "A man likes every pretty girl, but he

loves only one—at a time. When I was a young man about Gustave's age, I liked very much a girl who had £5000 a year and a pretty little property. I went to spend Christmas with her relations to see more of her, but there I met and fell in love with her friend who possessed not a sou, and had instead five sisters and three brothers. Fell in love the first evening we danced in the old hall under the mistletoe, fell deeper in love next morning as we skated together on the lake, proposed to her in the Conservatory on the third day, as I was leaving next morning unexpectedly to return to India, and felt heaven open when I was accepted, though it meant waiting seven years—the best seven years of our lives," he sighed. "What would happen if Gustave, like me, should fall in love with a penniless little friend of Mademoiselle Vera, eh?"

"My faith! But see here an English idea altogether typical," exclaimed Mémé. "My poor friend, in verity you arranged badly. The parents of your *fiancée*, they who put into the world nine children for whom they could not provide a *dot*, they also arranged badly. The relations of the young girl, who was an excellent *parti*, they should have conducted the affair with your parents and not have permitted the imagination and inexperience of the young man

to drag him at a gallop without a restraining hand to guide him. You became enamoured—yes, without doubt, ten times, a hundred times, the young man he experiences this emotion. And what is it then worth? It is in general a pretty flower, a scarlet poppy, which, after blooming a few weeks, is withered. Is this a foundation solid and dignified on which to construct the marriage, the life of the family? You ask me what would arrive if Gustave he became enamoured of a little friend of Vera without the sou! As well might you inquire what would arrive should he lose the head for the beautiful Czarina or for a pretty little grisette in the Chorus at the Opera. A man may become enamoured at any moment of any woman, in the same manner as you lost the head while you danced under the mistletoe, but is it for this that he must plunge himself into a marriage, *mon Dieu!* He must control his emotions, he must recognise, as well before marriage as after marriage, that this woman is not for him. In your case you ran a risk the most grave to spoil your life. What did you know of that young girl? What did she know of you? Her eyes were bright, her step was light, and she had the voice sympathetic and soft when one said to her words of love—not difficult that! For the

rest it was your idea you loved for seven years with such fidelity. And figure to yourself had you not both possessed the temperaments thus steadfast and equable, what miseries might have developed by an engagement and separation of such duration!"

Uncle Jack pondered some time in silence, looking at his friend with that kindly yet quizzical expression I knew signified he felt the truth and strength of her argument, and yet was not going to climb down one step from his position.

Mémé had spoken very fast and with passionate intensity. This was a subject which touched her to the quick, for she lives by her affections, and cannot bear to think that her view of the marriage question is not accounted by Uncle Jack, and by me also perhaps, to be on as high a plane as our own.

"Well, dear Mémé, all you say it is quite true," he said at length, "but you leave something out. You see I knew I had met the one woman I could love, and was going to love always. I allow it is a rare case, a rare happiness—eh, Betty, we know all about that, don't we?—and I was willing to pay the necessary price of poverty and waiting—thought it cheap, too! Now the *dot* means so much here in

France that you, even you Mémé, would have sacrificed that pearl of great price, the woman who means all the world to you, not only while the scarlet poppy blooms, but while the blood beats in your heart, and, God knows, perhaps after it has ceased to beat. You would have sacrificed that supreme gift to so many *mille livres de rente.* The *dot* occupies altogether too big a position with you French, though I quite allow that it is an excellent institution in its way, and I am exceedingly glad to hear that Mademoiselle Vera is so well equipped, for I know both you and our Gustave place it only just where it ought to be in the list of requirements, and that is at the tail end of the list."

"Ah, do not be too sure," Mémé laughed; "we are a people mercenary we other French. I see it clearly when you show me the superb romance and devotion of which an Englishman is sometimes capable. But the *dot,* that I permit not that one disparage. The *dot,* it is a duty that the parents owe to the daughter. Even as they owe to the son to provide for his future by an education and a profession suitable, so they must arrange also for the future of the daughter. And since, in France, the idea of the professions for women is as yet little in vogue in our world, to find a husband suitable

who will make the happiness of their child and give to her a position assured and honourable, a legitimate object in life for her affections and her capabilities, this becomes for every French parent a serious duty. That the interest and money of the family should be devoted alone to the career of the sons, as so often with you in England, that one would regard here in France as a grave injustice and also as a monstrous folly. We could not endure to picture for our daughters a future such as you English prepare for so many of your girls. A future without object, without money, without even the special education necessary to gain her life. Dwelling in a house where she is not a necessity, by cause of other sisters also leading the same useless existence, to pass the time she occupies herself with painting the pictures which are atrocious, or with the works of the philanthropy, that which, when it is made in the spirit serious and devout, is without doubt a thing excellent, but how often is it undertaken only as occupation by one whose life is empty, the unhappy one whose youth is past! Happily the problem of six, ten children, in the family which can only provide suitably for two or three, is not one we often give ourselves to solve here in France, but in all the cases the future of the girl

is regarded as of equal importance with that of the son."

"The son has to earn his own living, not so the girl," put in Uncle Jack, trying to say something for his arraigned countrymen.

"But behold what I say to you, the girl she has also a future to consider—how many times she is prevented from making a possible marriage because she has not the sou! Yourself you missed almost your marriage ideal because your *fiancée* possessed five sisters, instead of a pretty little *dot* with which you could have married yourselves and had no necessity to lose those seven beautful years of the life. The *dot* of the young girl is to the young man often as necessary as to his sister, see you!"

"Some truth in that, I must allow," conceded Uncle Jack, "but all the same I like the idea of the man working for the woman and owing her nothing, taking no money at all with her."

"Ah, what an idea Anglo-Saxon we have here!" cried Mémé, down on him remorselessly. "The equal partnership, the *ménage à deux*, in which the woman is veritable mistress within her own house, it does not find itself in your idea! No, not, the woman she belongs to the man even as his armchair. The house it is his, even the linen of the household

it is he who provides it and marks it with his initials. But with us the idea in the marriage it is different, the woman she reigns as queen in her *ménage*, she provides the linen, she marks it with her initials, and this little detail is symbolic of the partnership. Each one brings their share, and by consequence each one respects the individuality of the other. All this one may trace to the *dot*, which, even before she marries herself, gives to the young French girl a dignity, a repose of manner I have often observed to be painfully absent in the young English girl. One accords to her a place in the family of equal importance to that of her brother, and if she has no vocation for the marriage and prefers to make herself a religious, she needs equally the *dot* for this honourable career. You have against us in France that we make the marriages of 'convenience'; it is the marriage 'suitable' we seek. It is rather your young girls in England who make too often the marriage of convenience or of necessity, because they have not the sou and desire to be saved from the life of 'old girl.' Have I not observed her, the poor one, how she made the flirt with every one, and at the end accepted a man of whom she had mocked herself, because he was the sole to appear on the carpet. Like your young cousins, the Browns, she had

without doubt six sisters who trod her on the heels. *Oh-là-là!* you have prettily arranged for your poor daughters, you other English!"

Uncle Jack and I were laughing, but Mémé's eyes were bright, and two little pink spots in her cheeks showed the intensity of her feeling.

"He gives in, Mémé. He has not a leg to stand on, and your French Eagle has torn his Union Jack to shreds," I assured her. "As for me, you know I endorse every word you say. Had I possessed six sisters I should certainly have felt it my duty to drown them, or myself. My unique daughter, when I get her, is going to have twice as big a *dot* as my unique son, though the chances are that I shall then give him a larger share of my heart to make up. But you are right about that *dot*, and I know Uncle Jack is going to preach *dots* to his erring countrymen from this time forth. Why, even the babies in our nurseries are taught all wrong. Take that delicious little poem of Laurence Tadema's:

> "'If no one ever marries me,
> And I don't see why they should,
> For nurse says I'm not pretty,
> And I fear I'm seldom good.'

The infant ought to sing,

> "'For nurse says we've no money,
> And *sans dot* no man could (or would).'

The child's idea of bringing to a marriage only prettiness or goodness shows how far-reaching the error is."

There was one point in which Mémé did take Uncle Jack's advice, however, before they parted, and that was, that in spite of Gustave's wish that his mother should accompany him to Petersburgh she should decline doing so. "Let him act now for himself, take the responsibility of his marriage absolutely on his own shoulders," urged Uncle Jack, and Mémé, though fearing she was becoming almost English, yielded to this advice.

The following day Gustave called. He waited till I was alone. Then he asked abruptly: "Do you desire that I make this marriage, *ma cousine?*"

"I desire your happiness," I answered. "Go and see this young girl—you will know soon if you have found it. I believe you will assuredly find it with her," I added hopefully.

"You tell me, then, to go—You send me to seek a wife elsewhere—Yourself you say it—It is your last word for me!" Gustave did not look as tragic as his words sounded. I knew he would be all right as soon as he got into the train for Petersburgh and I was out of sight.

"My last word, by no means," I assured him.

"Be a good boy, and take plenty of warm covers and mantles of fur. And think of me very often as of a good kind sister who is longing to see your sweet little *fiancée*, and tell her what a dear boy she has been the fortunate one to gain.

So we parted, at least shortly after, for it does not do to prolong scenes with Gustave, he works himself up so quickly. He went off as if I were sending him straight into the cannon's mouth instead of into the arms of a charming little heiress. "I go because you have willed it," he repeated solemnly. "My destiny is in your hands." But three weeks had not elapsed before the arrival of that joyful telegram from Petersburgh. A letter to me followed in a few days' time in which he repeated his parting words, but with oh! what a different inflection. "His destiny had fared well in my hands, my gentle hands. To me he owed this great joy, for it was my decree alone which had determined him. With all his heart he thanked me. I had been to him a veritable guardian angel." (*N.B.*—In having guarded him so well from myself!)

The case of Monsieur de Sérignan is equally satisfactory, and I feel no uncomfortable responsibility, though assured by him also that I have decided his destiny. I had in a rash

moment made him a promise which I afterwards found it extremely difficult to fulfil. It was at Madame de Fleury's reception nearly two years ago, when as a substitute for myself I undertook to find him an English wife, beautiful and charming, good and rich. Of course, I really hoped to do so at the time, never realising the superhuman difficulties in the way, and certainly never dreaming that he would absolutely trust to me to settle him in life.

He became a frequent visitor at Avenue Friedland from that time, and though he brought me all his new songs to try over and they were always very sentimental, he most honourably kept the condition I had laid down that he should never "make the court."

On two or three occasions he met some English friend or relation when he called. They would have been somewhat startled had they known the reason for the close scrutiny with which the good-looking Marquis regarded them.

"It is she my destiny—yes?" his raised eyebrows inquired of me eloquently.

I would answer his look with one I tried to make inscrutable just to hold him awhile in a

pleasing suspense, until having manœuvred to get a word aside he would beg pathetically, "Mademoiselle, I pray you, it is she—yes! No!"

And generally, I am bound to say, a deep sigh of relief followed when I replied either that "this one she was Protestant and never would she consent to marry a Catholic," or "that one she was not a widow, but her husband was in India."

"But arrange for me when you are in England," he would say. "I trust absolutely to you, Mademoiselle. If you love her, me also I shall love her very surely. There is no necessity that I wait to see her here in Paris."

In vain I tried to explain to him how wholly impossible such a marriage would be in England. Even if I knew a girl who would give anything to make a happy and suitable marriage and whose opportunities for doing so were practically nil, the utmost I could do would be to say that I knew a charming Frenchman who I believed she would like, and who, I felt convinced, would fall desperately in love with her did he only have the chance.

"Would she, then, consent to come to Paris that we make the acquaintance?" he asked.

I shook my head. "I fear not, unless it could be managed in such a way as to be under

cover of quite another reason for coming. And then you must meet as if by accident, and as though you had never heard of each other, or it would be regarded as an affair altogether too cold-blooded, too designing and mercantile. In England we must have romance," I impressed upon him, as I saw my poor friend's expression of utter perplexity. "We have to fall in love before we marry; it is *de rigueur*, for we never, never do so afterwards."

"Ha! never, never one experiences the love after the marriage?" he inquired. "But how that should render the life simple in England! So for me, I cannot marry myself, while I rest here in Paris with a *demoiselle Anglaise* who is dwelling in London?"

"No means," I assured him. "But why not come to England yourself and seek and win a bride?"

Had I suggested he should turn Viking and sail off to Iceland, there to storm some ice-bound fortress and carry off a sea-king's daughter, he could not have looked more dismayed.

"Me! You will that I quit Paris, my dear Demoiselle? That I make the traversing of the sea and voyage to England? That I make the court and arrange the marriage! But know you with we other Frenchmen that does not do

itself! And me also who speak not a word of your tongue. Ah, behold, what miseries you would prepare for me, cruel! If I can marry myself only with that one of whom I am enamoured, then—it is yourself who have said it—there is but one sole *Anglaise* whom I should espouse!"

. . . . . .

It was not till six months after this that Monsieur de Sérignan and I met again. Mémé greeted me with the news that he had recently become affianced to a charming widow, and, curiously enough, I met the lady the following day calling on Mémé's afternoon of reception. We exchanged only a few words, but the impression was pleasant enough to enable me to offer really hearty congratulations to Monsieur de Sérignan when he came to see me.

He received my good wishes with a stately solemnity, rather disconcerting. Presently, other callers having taken their leave, and Uncle Jack having plunged into a political discussion with his friend Général de Lille which bid fair to immerse them for half-an-hour at least, Monsieur de Sérignan drew up his chair and begged me to grant him a few words of confidential conversation, a *causerie*, which he was pleased to describe as *à l'Anglaise*.

"I will open to you my heart, Mademoiselle,

for I desire your aid, and you have promised to be for me a sister, is it not so?" (It was true I had at his earnest and quaint request agreed to this relationship in default of the other he had desired.)

"Yes," I assented. "Very willingly will I be for you a sister!" (Here again I spoke without realising all possibilities involved in this promise.) "Tell me how you would that I should aid you?"

"It is of Madame de Puyroche that I desire to speak to you." He spoke low and glanced anxiously towards the two old gentlemen as though his words were treason. "I have deferred the final steps until I had obtained your counsels. With impatience I have awaited your coming. I dared not write to you, for Madame d'Aville, when I asked her permission, assured me that in England, even as here in France, it was not correct for *des messieurs* to address the letters to a *jeune demoiselle*."

"Madame d'Aville will always be a guide for *les convenances*," I agreed. "Never will you make a false step if you follow her advice. But mine, that is another affair. What counsels can I give you?'"

"Tell me with sincerity, with frankness, the impression that has made on you Madame

de Puyroche. Do you find that she has a good character? Is she reasonable, complacent, good heart? In fine, shall we accord well together, she and me? Shall I find the happiness with her?"

He was so thoroughly, so profoundly in earnest, I was obliged to meet him in the same mood and be serious too. So I answered with as weighty an air as I could put on:

"I consider that Madame de Puyroche has the air of a woman altogether charming, of a good character, a generous and sincere nature. You should be very happy together, for these are the essential qualities, and I am convinced that you will be happy."

He regarded me doubtfully.

"You say that perhaps like all the world. Always one says of all the *fiancées*, 'She is charming, she is ravishing.' Has one ever heard of a *fiancée* who is detestable, who is disobliging, who has any defect? But never in life!"

"But in verity," I assured him. "I say not that like all the world. It is all to the contrary, because I find there those qualities in the face of Madame de Puyroche. And you yourself are not then of my advice?" I asked.

"For me, I recognise that the marriage my

sister-in-law has had the goodness to arrange for me is a fine marriage. But the *dot*, the family, the young woman handsome and seductive, all that, though it is much, it is not all. With this it is possible at the same time for the happiness to escape, if the temperament of the wife accords not with that of the husband. I know well that what I say now would appear to many men of the world the folly pure, but me I have the taste of the interior, the taste *bourgeois*, if you will. I figure to myself when I am married to rest always near my wife, to lead the life *à deux* harmonious and gentle. Never would I take a mistress, me; never would I make *le jeu*, or frequent the clubs. Me I shall make a good husband! But you laugh, Mademoiselle? You find that amusing? Perhaps you believe me not?" he cried reproachfully.

And still I laughed. He looked at me with eyes in which I felt the chill of disappointment.

"You mock yourself of me," he said sadly.

"Ah! but no, but no," I hastened to assure him; "all to the contrary, I experience for you a real sympathy, a real friendship. I laughed because—well, I will tell you why I laughed." I lowered my voice: "It was because I thought how surprised the Uncle Jack and the Général would be if they could hear our conversation."

And this was the literal truth. M. de Sérignan, in his Gustave-like *naïveté*, never guessing why anything he had said should surprise anybody, looked startled, and went off on a wrong tack.

"Ha! Monsieur your uncle he would find me indiscreet that I should intrude myself upon you for so long time?" he inquired anxiously.

"No, no," I said, "he knows it is I who invite you to stay, and he finds always that which I do altogether well."

Before I knew what he would do, my emotional friend dropped on to one knee and, seizing my hand, pressed it to his lips.

"With all my heart I thank you," he murmured, and real tears were in his eyes. Then in a moment he was sitting conventionally upright in his chair again, and asking me if I would accord him yet one more grace before he made his *adieux*, namely, to look at a letter he had brought, and to read the character of the writer. He believed absolutely in the science of the *graphologie*, for which he knew I possessed a real gift.

In vain I disclaimed the gift; the letter was handed to me.

Graphologie, when combined with a slight knowledge of physiognomy and a good

memory, is not as difficult or mysterious an art as one might think. Of course I could guess who *cette personne* stood for, but I went through the form of observing, to begin with, that the writer was a woman, and of pure Latin race. It is well to start always with something obviously true—you strike the right note. Remembering that Mme. de Puyroche had a decided and somewhat masterful nose, a practical, determined chin, fine dark eyes with a pleasant, cheery light in them, and a feminine laughter-loving mouth, it was not difficult to trace the same characteristics in the clear, bold, and very womanly handwriting.

"The husband of this lady," I pronounced in my most oracular tones, "is a man to make envy all men. He has here a wife who is for him like the beneficent sun during the summer, like the good fire who re-warms when arrives the winter. She cares for him well; she has a head admirable for the affairs; he can leave all to her with the assurance that in her hands a hundred francs becomes as a thousand. Not by 'the play' or the speculation—Ah no! for all those follies this woman she has them in horror, but by the economy, the judgment judicious. Her *ménage* is well ordered, her interior perfect in all the respects. Never

would her husband, the fortunate one, sit himself down to a repast that was not admirably well prepared and served."

"Ah, Mademoiselle, you paint for me a picture of the Paradise," he laughed. "Only, see you, the husband of this lady is no more, and that other who contemplates to succeed him, he fears by this description a character too dominating, a will too inflexible. He would be happy, the miserable one, as is the well-nourished bird in the cage, is it not so? For I will confess to you that the unhappy one has not the will of iron precisely, nor the temperament dominating. Me, I know him a little, and I fear that soon he would succumb, see you?"

"But courage, courage! To that point there I find not that she is dominating. She is always woman, very woman. And though she has the nose pronounced, as one perceives by her writing of the letter 'I,' it is fine and aristocratic, and I remind myself that the mouth had the bow of Cupid, which detests not a kiss, and the thumb it was supple and adaptable, that which is borne out also by the curve and slant of this writing. Courage! all will march gaily. For the rest you, Monsieur, who have the temperament a little 'let go,' is it not better that you

espouse a wife who can *débarrasse* you from the annoyances and the affairs, etcetera, for which you have no taste ?"

This last argument, joined with the assurance of the Cupid-bow mouth, proved conclusive. Uncle Jack had ended his political debate, and the General was preparing to depart ; I thought it time to wind up our *séance*.

"It is then decided," said Monsieur de Sérignan. "You have pronounced my destiny. The marriage with Madame de Puyroche will consummate itself. You can guarantee it that her mouth it was of the Cupid's bow, even as is your own ? It is curious, but me I have not observed it."

"But yes, in truth, yes ! So accept my felicitations." I gave him my hand, which he apparently forgot to let go. Uncle Jack had accompanied his old friend to the door.

"If my mother were still on this earth she would embrace you and bless you for your goodness to her son. In the name of my mother"—his voice trembled and he hesitated—"dare I hope that one time you will accord me the permission to embrace you ? The pure kiss of the brother to the sister adopted, yes ? You remind yourself of our relation, is it not so ?"

"Unfortunately in England we have not that

custom," I answered, as if we were discussing a question for the County Council. "Never, never does that do itself, that the son embraces for the mother. I regret it infinitely, but so it is. Also the adopted brother kisses only one time the hand of the sister—and it is forbidden expressly to hold the hand more than three minutes."

It must be remembered that Monsieur de Sérignan's mother was an Italian; also that he has a highly cultivated tenor voice, both of which facts tend towards developing the emotional and romantic temperament. My mother is Irish, which no doubt accounts for my calm and equable disposition.

So when next I come to Paris both Gustave and Monsieur de Sérignan will be happily married, and done for! The relationship of adopted sister will be on a firmer basis, but I expect I shall miss them dreadfully, for a brother, whether adopted or natural born, is not at all the same thing when married.

THE END

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